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IBN KHALDŪN ON MAGIC AND THE OCCULT*

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Introduction

The present work is dedicated to the analysis of the views on magic and the occult sciences of the fourteenth-century Arab Muslim thinker Walī al-Dīn Abū Zaid ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn. He was born in Tunis in 1332 and died in Cairo in 1406. During his life he was in service in various courts in the Maghrib and Muslim Spain, where his life was quite restless, marked by courtly intrigues and even imprisonment for 21 months, when he was at the court of Fez (1354-1362). He lived the last 24 years of his life in Egypt where he was appointed judge on a number of occasions.¹

His main work is the *Muqaddima*, meaning prolegomenon,² a treatise on human civilisation and state, where he discusses at length the nature of state, kingship, and related matters. This book constitutes the first volume of a larger treatise dedicated to the history of the Arabs and those states and peoples that had played, in Ibn Khaldūn’s view, a historically significant role.

Several sections of this work are about magic and the occult sciences, and a whole prolegomenon³ on the problem of human knowledge, in which the author examines the nature of prophecy, divination, sainthood, and the types of human perception. In a separate section of the sixth chapter he speaks also about Sufism, highlighting the way of Sufi mystics and the properties of their knowledge. Furthermore, an important part of Ibn Khaldūn’s occult lore is constituted by section 53 from the third chapter, which is on the eschatological divination (*jafṛ*). Finally, in his treatise on the Sufis, called “The Cure for One Who Asks, for the Improve-

* I am deeply grateful to Prof. Aziz Al-Azmeh for his kind assistance and valuable advice during my work on this paper.

¹ For his life, see Nassif Nassar, *La pensée réaliste d'Ibn Khaldūn* (Paris, 1967): 9-14, and Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn* (Cairo, 1993): 1-6.

² Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, ed. ‘Abdallah al-Bustānī (Lebanon: Maktabat Lubnān, 1990), and Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). The first one from henceforth will be mentioned in the footnotes as *Muqaddima*, the second one as Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*.

³ Ibn Khaldūn’s *Muqaddima* consists of six chapters, the first of which contains seven prolegomena; each of them focuses on a particular topic connected with human life, such as the influence of the climate and geographical zones on human temper, and so on.

ment of Questions" (*Shifā' al-sā'il li tahdhīb al masā'il*), Ibn Khaldūn examines the nature of the mystical knowledge of the Sufis.⁴ In the sixth chapter he considers in certain sections each of the occult sciences: magic and talismanic art, alchemy, astrology, and dream interpretation. I have examined here also his refutation of philosophy, which is a section in the same chapter of *Muqaddima*. Although philosophy does not belong to the "occult sciences", I have, however, tried to analyse his views on this branch of knowledge as well, since it may give us a better understanding of Ibn Khaldūn's epistemology. In the third chapter of his *Shifā' al-sā'il* Ibn Khaldūn offers a detailed discussion of the magic of letters and numbers. A section on eschatological divination, the so-called *jafr*, is in the third chapter of *Muqaddima*.

Most of the mentioned sciences are refuted by the author (with the exception of oneiromancy) on different grounds, theological, epistemological, natural-scientific, and so on. However, in all of them one can see the author's concern for the state and human civilisation; in fact, what all these refutations have in common, is the evaluation according to their significance for the well being of state.⁵

In fact, this part of Ibn Khaldūn's writings is not well examined. There are, to my knowledge, only a few remarks on his writings on magic and the occult sciences, and even these mostly either have a summarising character, or, being incorporated into the framework of larger publications, are very general, containing relatively little analysis.

In order to understand Ibn Khaldūn's positions on magic and the occult properly, a brief presentation of the views of the renowned Ash'arite theologian al-Bāqillānī would be of some interest, as Ibn Khaldūn, being himself an Ash'arite, was the representative of the same school of Islamic *Weltanschauung* and, therefore, bearer of the same religious mentality. Al-Bāqillānī is the author of a unique treatise on the nature of miracles, called *Kitāb al-Bayān 'an al-firaq bayna al-mu'jizāt wa al-karāmāt wa al-ḥiyal wa al-kahānati wa al-siḥri wa al-nīranjāt* (A treatise on the nature of the apologetic miracle and its differentiation from charisms, trickery, divination, magic and spells).⁶ The main topics which al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb al-*

⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *Shifā' al-sā'il li tahdhīb al masā'il* (The Cure for One Who Asks, for the Improvement of Questions), ed. Ignace-Abdo Khalifé (Beirut, 1959).

⁵ See Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 115.

⁶ Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān 'an al-firaq bayna al-mu'jizāt wa al-karāmāt wa al-ḥiyal wa al-kahānati wa al-siḥri wa al-nīranjāt* (A Treatise on the Nature of

Bayān deals with are: the apologetic miracle, the definition of magic, and the difference between magic and miracle.

A miracle, in order to be such, according to this author, must be accompanied by a challenge for prophecy; it is something which God alone has the power to perform, and something which violates custom. A challenge for prophecy is aimed at proving the truthfulness of a prophet. If an action that ordinary people cannot do (such as reviving dead people, curing lepers, and so on) is performed by a human being and is accompanied by such a claim, it is a miracle. If it is not, then it is either a wonder performed by a saint,⁷ or magic. However, if one, without being a prophet, performs some action, which is out of the scope of the power of the creatures, and accompanies it with a claim for prophecy, God will deprive him of the power to do it. The meaning of the statement that God alone has the power over miracles is that they are actually performed by God and not by the prophet.⁸ Finally, miracle is defined as an action which violates custom. Al-Bāqillānī explains custom as the repetition of the attributes of a thing, and of the modes in which a certain action is performed.⁹

Al-Bāqillānī states that there are two types of magic: mere trickery, which is done with the help of different devices and is aimed at deceiving the spectators by creating visual illusions (*sha'badha, nīranjāt*), and the other type, which is attested in the Qur'an and prophetic traditions, that is, performing different acts impossible to be performed by ordinary people (such as entering the belly of a cow, or inflicting illness on a person, and the like).¹⁰

According to al-Bāqillānī, all that a magician does is in reality done by God. He bases his argument on the premise that the one who acts "cannot effect anything outside himself, and it is impossible that he performs any action that lies outside the scope of his power, and transgresses his limits (*muta'addiyya*)".¹¹ And as we have seen, the actions of a magician "are of the type of some miracles of prophets, and what God does when they make a challenge

the Apologetic Miracle and its Differentiation from Charisms, Trickery, Divination, Magic and Spells), ed. Richard J. McCarthy, S. J. (Beirut: Librarie Orientale, 1958). See also Yusuf Ibish, "Life and Works of al-Bāqillānī", *Islamic Studies* 4 (1965): 225-236; R. J. McCarthy, "Al-Bāqillānī", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v.; Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*: 237; on al-Bāqillānī's philosophical views, see Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane* (Paris, 1948): 62-64.

⁷ Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, paragraph 56.

⁸ *Ibid.*: § 55.

⁹ *Ibid.*: §§ 57, 58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: §§ 90-92.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: § 105.

for prophecy". Therefore, as in the case of the prophet, all a magician does is in reality performed by God. Thus, magic does exist, says al-Bāqillānī.¹²

Finally, al-Bāqillānī specifies the difference between a miracle and magic. Though the latter belongs, as has been shown, to the type of action that prophets do, it differs from a miracle by the fact that a miracle is accompanied by a challenge for prophecy. And, as was mentioned above, if a magician has suchlike ambitions, God will deprive him of the ability to perform magic, or will prove his falsehood. What is similar between a miracle and a magical act is that both of them are performed by God alone. In fact, this kind of idea can be found in Ibn Khaldūn as well, although he says that the powers assisting the magician can be devils, but nevertheless, the magician and the prophet are similar in their nature, since they both use supernatural powers.¹³ Of course, they differ in what powers they use, and how they use them. In fact, this will be one of the questions discussed in the present article.

Ibn Khaldūn's interest in such topics as prophecy, divination, sainthood and related matters, probably, to certain extent were determined by the prophetic and messianic movements in North Africa during the 10th-14th centuries.¹⁴ Moreover, in the mentioned period the rising tide of occultism inundated the lands of Islam as a whole, becoming a serious threat for the orthodoxy as if an alternative form of religious cult. Perhaps, in certain Islamic intellectual and religious circles the rise of occultism was viewed as a social disaster, seriously harming the fundamentals of state. This very approach is explicitly traced in Ibn Khaldūn's interpretation of the occult arts.

The religious atmosphere of that period in North Africa, particularly in Egypt, was practically under the heavy influence of

¹² *Ibid.*: § 110.

¹³ This concept has its ancient background reflected in the old terminology related to magic and prophecy in the Near Eastern languages. For instance, in the majority of Iranian terms designating *magician* and *prophet*, the same primary semantics is observed, i.e. "one who has supernatural power", or "one who utters magical formulae", also "one who foresees the future" (see in detail Geo Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, Stuttgart, 1964: 327 et sq.; H.W. Bailey, *The Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan*, Delmar-New York, 1982: 55; Գ. Ս. Ասատրյան, "Կախարդներն ու մոգութիւնը Հայաստանում եւ Իրանում", *Իրան Նամէ Արեւելագիտական Հանդէս*, NN 18-19 (1996): 25-26).

¹⁴ Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 68.

Isma‘ili messianic views, a situation, which resulted in the formation of various mystical groups and religious schools.¹⁵

Ibn Khaldūn lived under successors of the states who maintained their messianic and prophetic claims. During the reign of the Almohad dynasty, there occurred many minor scale messianic movements, mentioned by Ibn Khaldūn, which he regarded as harmful for state. The impact of messianism and sainthood on the social and religious life of North Africa can be well explicated by the emergence of a number of prominent mystics, such as Ibn ‘Arabī (1165-1240),¹⁶ Ibn Qasī (d. 1151)¹⁷ and Ibn Sab‘īn (d.1269-71).¹⁸ All three originated from Spain, and they taught the doctrine of the cyclical return:¹⁹ prophecy will be followed by caliphate, and then will be followed by kingship, then come falsehood and tyranny, after which prophecy will be revived by sainthood, to be succeeded in its turn by the Antichrist, who will be overcome by the Messiah (*mahdī*).²⁰ Ibn Khaldūn is quite sceptical towards these predictions, saying that they mostly resemble “riddles”.²¹

However, despite the critical approach of Ibn Khaldūn towards the religious heterodoxies and mystical trends of his time, he was nevertheless a true representative of his epoch and, therefore, could in no way escape the influence of the highly mysticised atmosphere prevailing in North Africa during his life. Hence, probably, Ibn Khaldūn’s keen interest in magic, the occult sciences, prophecy, sainthood, and related subjects.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE OCCULT AND THE HUMAN SOUL

The Place of Man in the Chain of Being; Human Soul

For understanding Ibn Khaldūn’s perception of the difference between human capacities pertaining to prophecy, sainthood, divination and related topics, we must first look at the metaphysical foundations of this concept and see how he evaluates the place of man in the Chain of Being and how he defines human soul.

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (Edinburgh, 1986): 316; Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Harvard, 1991): 185. Abdallah Laroui, *L’histoire du Maghreb* (Paris, 1975): 162, etc.

¹⁶ See A. Atesh, “Ibn ‘Arabī”, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v.

¹⁷ See A. Faure, “Ibn Qasī”, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v.; also Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam* (London, 1989): 70.

¹⁸ See Baldick, *op.cit.*: 93.

¹⁹ Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 91.

²⁰ *Muqaddima*: 324.

²¹ *Ibid.*: 323.

All being constitutes a chain along which the creatures are ranged in a hierarchy, starting from the primitive ones and ending with God. In this hierarchy each higher level is more perfect, "more subtle" (*alṭaf*). Thus, first comes the world of minerals, which is followed by the world of plants, above which are the animals, then comes man, starting from whom upwards each higher level partakes more of divine nature,²² being thus more "sacred", the lower level being more "profane";²³ these are the levels of celestial beings, such as the planets and stars,²⁴ angels, until this whole chain ends with God, who is the highest and the most perfect point in it.

However, these orders of being are not alienated from each other, and the highest point of each level is contiguous to the lowest point of the one above it. Thus, "The last stage of minerals is connected with the first stage of plants, such as herbs and seedless plants. The last stage of plants, such as palms and vines, is connected with the first stage of animals, such as snails and shellfish which have only the power to touch".²⁵

The key point of this linkage, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is that "the last stage of each group is fully prepared to become the first stage of the next group".²⁶ So, there are no sharp dividing lines between the orders; there are, rather, intermediate zones, which may pertain to both levels, as, according to the author, shells are.²⁷

In Ibn Khaldūn's anthropology man occupies a central position in the Chain of Being. He is contiguous to the world of terrestrial beings insofar as he has a physical body, and to the world of celestial beings insofar as he has a soul. In this sense he is unique, being the point where the two worlds meet, the world of terrestrial being, and the celestial world, incorporating in himself parts of both these. The human soul, which is the highest and most perfect part of man, "...cannot be seen, but its influence is evident in the body.

²² See Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies* (London, 1986): 7.

²³ This is a Neo-Platonic idea, according to which all being to different extent partakes of divine nature, all creatures "participating in the nature of Good, in the measure in which each... [is] capable to do so" (Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, Cambridge, 1964: 62). This idea of "participating in the nature of Good" lies in the observation of Ibn Khaldūn that the soul of a saint experiences "supreme happiness" when ascending into spiritual spheres and contemplating the "face of God" (Ibn Khaldūn, *Shifā' al-sā'ih* 31).

²⁴ *Muqaddimah*: 95.

²⁵ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. I: 195.

²⁶ *Ibid.* On the Chain of Being in Islamic thought, see Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 2-13.

²⁷ Cf. "Nature refuses to conform to our craving for clear lines of demarcation; she loves twilight zones, where forms abide which, if they are to be classified at all, must be assigned to two classes at once" (Aristotle, *apud* Lovejoy, *op.cit.*: 56).

It is as if all (the body's) parts, in combination or separately, were organs of the soul and its powers. The powers of action are touching with the hand, walking with the foot, speaking with the tongue, and the total combined motion with the body".²⁸

For Ibn Khaldūn it is the human soul that affects the human body. Human soul for the body is "like the horseman for the horse, or the king for his subjects; it acts upon the body, and moves it by its will... and the latter cannot disobey it for even one second, because of the power that God has endowed it [i.e. the soul] with".²⁹ Therefore, man pertains to both, the terrestrial and the celestial worlds not by mere coexistence of these two natures in him, but also by the fact that one of them (the terrestrial one, i.e. the body) is dependent on the other, and therefore, is bound to it. This is because "the base has no autonomous constitution independent of the sublime".³⁰

One last observation. According to Arthur Lovejoy, the Western Medieval thought was marked by the opposition of two notions of God. "The one God was the goal of the "way up", of that ascending process by which the finite soul, turning from all created things, took its way back to the immutable Perfection in which alone it could find rest. The other God was the source and the informing energy of that descending process by which being flows through all the levels of possibility down to the very lowest".³¹ Neo-Platonism chose the second of these doctrines, regarding the existence of the multitude of degrees that are inferior to the Absolute not as entailing evil to a greater degree, but as simply deprived of good, while the first one was chosen by Medieval Christianity.

As to Ibn Khaldūn, being an orthodox Muslim, he accepts the first way of seeing God as the "goal of the way up", as the ultimate source of knowledge and of the highest degree of happiness (*sa'āda kubrā*), "which [occurs from] contemplating the face of God".³²

²⁸ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 1: 196.

²⁹ *Shifā' al-sā'it* 80.

³⁰ Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 8. In fact, the distinction between activeness and passiveness is "the general distinction between spiritual and corporeal entities" (see *ibid.*: 12). Ibn Khaldūn's perception of human soul is very similar to that of Avicenna. The latter accepts the idea of "...the essential divinity of human soul. This is what guarantees the influence of the soul on the body and on matter in general. ...The soul is a substance which organises its own body, preserves and controls it..." (Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, London, 1958: 48).

³¹ Lovejoy, *op. cit.*: 83.

³² *Shifā' al-sā'it* 31.

The Types of Human Souls

The classification of human souls by Ibn Khaldūn follows the pattern of the ability of ascending along the Chain of Being. On this ability depends their capacity of achieving knowledge: the greater the ability, the higher the level of knowledge. Thus, the distinction is epistemo-sociological, since it divides people into classes, whence comes the difference in their capacities of achieving knowledge.

He divides people into three categories according to the capacities of their souls. First, those whose souls are incapable of transcending bodily perception by their nature³³ and whose knowledge is thus confined to the “primary intelligibles” (*al-awwaliyāt*),³⁴ “and these are in general the boundaries of human knowledge”.³⁵ The second type are saints and the learned. Their souls are capable of spiritual knowledge, for which they do not need bodily senses. Thus, they can perceive things which are beyond the primary intelligibles, and dwell in the realm of “internal observations” (*mushāhadāt bāṭiniya*); that is to say, their souls are capable of intuitive and logical-discursive perception of reality.³⁶ Finally, those who have the most perfect type of human souls are of prophets. Their soul “is by nature suited to exchange humanity altogether, both corporeal and spiritual humanity, for angelicity of the highest stage, so that it may actually become an angel in the flash of a moment, glimpse the... celestial sphere [*al-Mala’ al-A’lā*], and listen to... divine address during that moment”.³⁷

Thus, the soul of a prophet is the highest level of the human souls, in the same way that a palm tree is the highest point in the world of plants. Therefore, being the ultimate point, it is capable of transcending the level of humanity in the Chain of Being due to the aforementioned “strange capacity of the highest point of each level to become the lowest one on the higher level”. It is the prophets who are capable of entering into the realm of spiritual beings, whence they acquire knowledge of future events. And it is

³³ According to Ibn Khaldūn, “each specific entity has a specific nature inherent in it, a qualitative nature which has certain properties of a substantive rather than... a functional nature” (Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn*: 52).

³⁴ For the “primary intelligibles”, see *ibid.*, and *Muqaddima*: 514; Ibn Khaldūn defines them as the basic abstract ideas, i.e. those that are separate from the beings they represent, which are imprinted on everyone’s mind.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 97.

³⁶ The intuitive knowledge achieved by the saints is, in fact, divine inspiration, but there is difference between the inspiration of a prophet (*waḥy*) and the inspiration of a saint (*ilhām*). One is achieved naturally, the other intentionally.

³⁷ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 1: 199.

very important that they reach this condition without any intentional exercise (*riyāḍa*), because it is in their “nature”,³⁸ which God has bestowed upon them. The prophets, thus, attain knowledge of invisible things or future events, from God, through intermediary agents such as angels. Prophetic knowledge of future events can be regarded as “possession divination”, that is, one in which God communicates with people (in this case the prophet) through intermediary agents.³⁹

There are two types of prophetic inspiration (*waḥy*). One is sent to the prophet concerned in the form of a noise “which is like a symbol (*ramz*)”⁴⁰ [for them], which does not end until they fully grasp its meaning”.⁴¹ The other occurs when an angel appears to the prophet in human form and talks to him. Ibn Khaldūn makes a distinction between these two types of inspiration, evaluating the first one as inferior to the second, since it is being sent to the prophets, who are not initially delegated for their mission, whereas the second type, which is sent in the guise of an angel, is more perfect, since it is being sent to the primarily delegated apostolic prophets for their prophetic mission. This division is that of social order: the delegated prophet (*rasūl*) is one, who is a head of the community of the believers, and who has been sent with a scripture, whereas the non-delegated one, although preaching for true religion, is not a head of the community and has no scripture.⁴²

The Perception of Knowledge by Ibn Khaldūn

In Ibn Khaldūn’s view there are two main ways of attaining knowledge: that attained by bodily senses, and that inspired by supernatural beings. The capacities of perception are also graded in a hierarchical way, beginning with bodily perception, and ending with inspiration by supernatural powers.

³⁸ By “exercise” the author means the techniques used by the Sufis for attaining the ability of supernatural perception: “the exercise is the purification of the heart from sins and its improvement by... denying the bodily desires that are being sent by the devil, from the delights of this world and its pleasures, which are... the intercourse with people, and the pleasures of eating and... sleeping...” (*Shifā’ al-sā’il* 37). Thus, the exercise is the abstention from all these bodily pleasures, and also inner concentration towards God.

³⁹ See Evan Zuesse, “Divination”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade. “Possession divination” is that “in which spiritual beings are said to communicate through intermediary agents”.

⁴⁰ *Muqaddima*: 97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 98.

⁴² It seems that the so called non-delegated prophets are those sent by God as preachers and *nadhīr* [i.e. foreseer]... to their people, “but are not the head of an *umma* [i.e. community] like the *rasūl*” (Wensinck, “Rasūl”, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v.).

Ibn Khaldūn starts with the bodily perception, enumerating several stages of it, each higher one of which is more perfect than the previous stage; such are: general perception (*ḥiss mushtarak*), which is for perceiving things by bodily devices, imagination (*khayāl*), which helps one to perceive a given object as it is, without foreign elements; then there comes the estimative power of the soul called *wāhima*, the function of which is the perception of attitude of the soul towards certain objects, such as enmity, friendliness, etc.; then comes memory, the function of which is storing the perceived realities. Finally he arrives at the “power of mind” (*quwwatu al-fikr*), which is the power that inclines the soul towards contemplation, and towards striving after a higher level of knowledge, the supernatural one. Having passed these stages and already transcending human nature, the human soul becomes capable of perceiving spiritual entities without bodily senses.⁴³ People capable of achieving this type of knowledge are prophets, saints and diviners. Despite their difference in what pertains to their social role as good or bad, their knowledge is of the same nature, being inspired by supernatural powers.⁴⁴

The ultimate source of supernatural knowledge is God. He bestows upon those whom He chooses the knowledge of invisible matters and future events. God sends this knowledge directly to the prophets.⁴⁵

Yet it is not always God who sends supernatural knowledge to people. Some of them by themselves are capable of lifting the “veil of the senses” and, entering into the spiritual realm, achieving knowledge of future events and invisible matters. “The invisible matters cannot be perceived by any art, and there is no way to know them except for those who by their nature are capable of transcending the terrestrial world and entering the spiritual realm”.⁴⁶ However, sometimes this spiritual knowledge is being inspired by God, as is the case with saints, and sometimes by demons, as in the case of diviners. Neither of these is reliable to the

⁴³ *Muqaddima*: 97. This scheme very much resembles the one drawn by Avicenna, and Ibn Khaldūn is likely to have borrowed it from him, see Majid Fakhry, *op.cit.*: 159-161.

⁴⁴ See Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought*: “And whereas it was commonly assumed that soothsaying is an evil power inspired by the devil in contrast to the divinatory power inspired by God (prophecy), both are, fundamentally, of the same operational nature. This is so despite the infallibility of prophecy and the fallibility of soothsaying, which is due to the lack of total liberation from matter of the soothsayer’s soul”.

⁴⁵ On the notion of knowledge in Medieval Islam, see Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: the Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: 1970).

⁴⁶ *Muqaddima*: 113.

same extent as that of the prophets, since they happen “by accident” and are not necessary, and moreover, in the case of diviners it is inspired by fraudulent demons.

Discursive knowledge, based on rational operations, is not denied by Ibn Khaldūn, but in the case of invisible matters and future events it is deemed impossible. This statement must also have social motivation behind it, because “the secrets of creation and the art of maintaining omnipotence are... correlative, and both the exclusive preserve of God...”.⁴⁷ The possibility of knowledge of matters that are remote temporarily and spatially can be socially harmful.

Ibn Khaldūn also rejects the possibility of all encompassing knowledge, basing this view on the limits of human life. This can be seen especially in his refutations of alchemy and astrology. For instance, while refuting alchemy, Ibn Khaldūn states that if even it were possible to attain the knowledge of how to make gold out of base metals, it would require to emulate all the stages passed by nature for generating gold, which would take too much time for which human life would not suffice.⁴⁸

In all, knowledge is presented by Ibn Khaldūn in natural- scientific and theological terms. Insofar as it is connected with the material world, it depends on the powers of human soul, which are, as mentioned above, graded hierarchically. These powers enable the soul to attain knowledge of different levels, among which each higher one is more abstract and devoid of material features, and therefore, more perfect.⁴⁹ Entering into the spiritual realm, the knowledge of the soul becomes dependent on other, supernatural sources, God, or demons. There is also a subtle distinction between the knowledge of a saint and a prophet. The knowledge of a prophet is superior to that of a saint because it is socially important.

The Characteristics of Prophets

Prophets have certain characteristics and certain signs by which they can be discerned. The most important distinction, made on theological grounds, is the ability of prophets to perform miracles. Ibn Khaldūn defines them as acts, “the type of which people do

⁴⁷ Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 95.

⁴⁸ See page *Muqaddima*: 528.

⁴⁹ Ibn Khaldūn locates the centre of each power in a separate section of the human brain (*Muqaddima*: 97).

not have the power to perform”.⁵⁰ This very much resembles the views of al-Bāqillānī, according to whom there are some actions, which are of the type (*jīns*) of which creatures can do and of which small quantities enter into the scope of the creatures’ power, such as jumping from east to west, ascending into the air, and so on.⁵¹ But they can, nevertheless, be regarded as miracles, because the quantity in which (that is, the degree to which) they are performed also violates custom.⁵² Still, there are some actions even the type of which is outside the scope of creatures’ power: it is altogether impossible that God enables creatures to perform them (such as re-viving the dead, curing lepers, and the like).⁵³

Ibn Khaldūn brings in the views of the Ash‘arites, the philosophers and the Mu‘tazilites on this matter. The Ash‘arites claim that a miracle is not performed by the prophet but by God alone, since it is not of the type (*jīns*) of a prophet’s actions. What makes the miracle a distinctive mark for a prophet is his claim for prophecy. These ideas can be found in al-Bāqillānī’s *Kitāb al-Bayān*. He defines miracle as an action which “God alone has power to perform”,⁵⁴ and which lies beyond the scope of the power of the creatures, an action which violates custom, and finally an action which is accompanied by a challenge for prophecy, since it is aimed at proving the truthfulness of a prophet. It means that a miracle is performed by God alone, and in no way by a prophet, since it lies “beyond the scope of power of the creatures”.⁵⁵ A challenge for prophecy, according to this author, is when the prophet performs a certain action and declares himself a prophet for being able to do it, and then he asks those who do not believe him, to do the same thing. If he is a real prophet, people will not be able to perform the same action, even if it is of the type of action, which people are in other cases able to perform, such as lifting one’s hand, standing up from one’s place, and the like. “And if the Prophet, may God pray upon him, challenges those who disobey him and proclaim him a liar, to move his hand or to stand up from his place, and he [i.e. the one who disobeys] is not able to do so, then the movements of

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 93.

⁵¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, § 82.

⁵² *Ibid.*, § 83. Thus, if lifting a weight is well within the scope of the creatures’ power, to lift a mountain, although it is of the type of lifting weights, is a quantity of that type of action, which (i.e. the quantity) violates custom; therefore, it may be regarded as a miracle, if, of course, accompanied by a challenge for prophecy.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, §§ 8, 9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, §§ 51, 52.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, § 6.

Prophet's limbs, and his standing up, and their incapability of doing so, will show the Prophet's truthfulness".⁵⁶

Thus, even if moving one's hand or standing from one's place is what creatures generally are capable of doing, if accompanied by a challenge for prophecy, they will become impossible for creatures to perform. God will deprive them of the capacity of doing these actions in order to prove the truthfulness of the prophet.

The Mu'tazilites hold that fraudulent miracles cannot happen; the reason for this is that "acts violating custom do not pertain to the actions of men [but are performed by God]",⁵⁷ and since it is improper (*qabīḥ*) for God to sustain an action which is accompanied by a false claim, then such a "proof" cannot originate from God.⁵⁸

Finally, the philosophers' view is that a "miracle is from a prophet's acts", and the proof for a prophet of being such is his ability to command the elements (i.e. the four elements, which are fire, air, water and earth),⁵⁹ since it is in the nature of the prophet's soul.⁶⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, however, is more inclined towards the view of the Ash'arites, saying that their argument is stronger than that of the philosophers, since according to their views, prophecy is sustained by God, while that of the philosophers relies on the "nature" of the prophet's soul,⁶¹ although he himself accepts the view of the prophet's soul being such for its specific nature. Thus, a theological argument in this case is more valid for Ibn Khaldūn than a natural scientific one.

The second major trait of a prophet, an epistemological one, is his ability to attain "[supernatural] knowledge, and to speak about future events and invisible matters, the knowledge of which is impossible except if taught by God".⁶²

The process of achieving this knowledge is usually accompanied by the condition of trance: "The sign by which this type of human being can be recognised is that, in the state of inspiration, they seem to be removed from those who are present. This is accompa-

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, § 16.

⁵⁷ *Muqaddima*: 94.

⁵⁸ This argument is made in keeping with the second Mu'tazilite thesis, about God's justice (see Gardet and Anawati, *op.cit.*: 49: "La deuxième thèse mu'tazilite est celle de la justice de Dieu... Dieu, être intelligent et sage... est tenu de faire toujours le meilleur, *al-aṣḥaḥ*: il ne peut désirer que le bien").

⁵⁹ See Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 7, and Fakhry, *op. cit.*: 96, 138.

⁶⁰ *Muqaddima*: 94.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 94.

⁶² *Ibid.*: 91.

nied by a feeling of being choked that looks like swooning or unconsciousness but has nothing to do with either. In reality, it is an immersion in [and] encounter with the spiritual kingdom, the result of perceptions congenial to them but entirely foreign to the [ordinary] perceptions of men. [These extraordinary perceptions] are then brought down to the level of human perceptions in the form of some speech sound the person [who receives the revelation] hears and is able to understand, or in the form of an individual delivering the divine message to him. The state of [remoteness] then leaves him, but he retains the content of the given revelation".⁶³

One of the most important properties of a prophet is his impeccability: "before a revelation is sent to them, prophets are in the condition of goodness (*khulq al-khayr*) and purity, and they avoid all the condemnable things and sins, and this is the meaning of impeccability (*'isma*)".⁶⁴

Ibn Khaldūn further enumerates other signs of prophecy, which are not important from the doctrinal point of view, since they cannot be viewed as distinctive for a prophet. Namely, preaching true religion and being respected by his kinsmen.⁶⁵

All the aforementioned traits are assumed to be prerequisites for the prophet's social function, that is, to be an intermediary between God and the creatures, to guide them along the true path, and save them from the torments of Hell. In fact, they "are to... keep [their fellow men] out of the fire of Hell and to show them the path to salvation. The knowledge that God gave these individuals... can be learned only from God, through the mediation of [these individuals]...".⁶⁶ For Ibn Khaldūn a prophet is, therefore, not merely one who has the capacity of supernatural knowledge, but one who also has social obligations; that is, he has to deliver divine truth to people, to show them the way for salvation. Here we can see Ibn Khaldūn's concern for social welfare: a prophet is sent because he is useful for human civilisation, just as a king is

⁶³ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 1: 185. On the types of prophetic revelation.

⁶⁴ *Muqaddima*: 92.

⁶⁵ See the account of Ibn Khaldūn's views on the distinctive marks of prophets in Toufic Fahd, *La divination arabe* (Ph.D. diss., University of Strasbourg): 79-81. However, the author does not distinguish between these signs as essential, i.e. important for discerning a prophet from other people, and non-essential.

⁶⁶ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 1: 184.

useful for keeping people from anarchy, which is inherent in their nature.⁶⁷

The Knowledge of Saints

Another type of people capable of supernatural knowledge are the saints. They achieve this by different ascetic exercises, such as fasting and vigil, and by concentrating their attention towards God. They “concentrate their attention towards God, in order to achieve the taste (*dhawq*) of the unity of God, they, in their exercises resort to... hunger...[etc.]”,⁶⁸ and with the help of these exercises “the heart of a saint becomes purified from sins, and then, by extinguishing bodily powers and striving towards [divine] truth... they succeed in lifting the veil of senses... and divine light shines onto them, and here they achieve the knowledge of the secrets of Being... and realm of the sky and of the earth and the meanings of the sciences become clear to them...”⁶⁹

As we see, the saints achieve the knowledge of “divine truth”. But this knowledge is not their main goal, otherwise their attention would be concentrated on a subject other than God. The acquisition of knowledge happens by accident (*bi-l-‘araḍ*). The main goal of a Sufi is to attain “the taste (*dhawq*) of the unity of God”, or, in other words, the “supreme happiness” which happens by means of “contemplation of the face of God”.⁷⁰ Saints also are capable of performing acts that violate custom, which are called wonders. These are akin to miracles by their nature, but are distinct from them insofar as they are not accompanied by claim for prophecy.

In this way, the difference between prophetic knowledge and the knowledge of a saint is the same as that between a miracle and wonder, because both the knowledge of a prophet and miracles have a social function sustained by God for the well being of people. The function of prophetic knowledge is to instruct people and lead them along the path of righteousness, and miracles are performed in order to prove the truthfulness of a prophet. Meanwhile, both the knowledge of a saint and wonders have a purely individual character in the sense that they are intended by the saint him-

⁶⁷ See Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn*: 29. A king, according to Ibn Khaldūn, “is the representative of the ultimate order guaranteed by God himself” (see *ibid.*: 29). Because of this very concern for social welfare he repudiates divination and occult sciences.

⁶⁸ *Muqaddima*: 109.

⁶⁹ *Shifā’ al-sā’it* 47.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 31.

self and do not constitute the part of divine economy. And even if they are sustained by divine power, they occur merely because they are willed by the saint, are not designed by God for the social well being. “It [i.e. the supernatural knowledge] is a light that God throws into the heart of the one who is purified with exercises... and if [the saint] achieves the knowledge of any Divine secret or spiritual wisdom, or anything from the utterances of Law [*shar*] and ambiguous places [*mushtabahāt*] of the Scripture turn clear to him... he [merely] continues his way towards God, and does not spread it [i.e. the knowledge] since it is appropriate to keep the secrets of God”.⁷¹ Hence, the inferiority of wonders and the knowledge of saints to miracles and the knowledge of prophets.

Another, purely natural reason for this is that the knowledge of a saint does not occur necessarily but “by accident”, and, therefore, is partial. It is not necessary that a saint possesses this knowledge, it is out of the divine economy: that is why it is not natural (in the sense of being innate or intrinsic and non-volitional) but intended (volitional, requiring effort).⁷² Accordingly, in his way towards the divine truth a saint is in the danger of losing the true path, since the steps which lead to the supreme truth are concealed from our eyes, and it is very easy for the follower of the path (*sālik*) to lose his way. For this reason, he needs a spiritual teacher (*shaykh*), who has experienced all these stages and who would lead him and keep away from erring.⁷³ Meanwhile, a prophet is led by God Himself and needs no guide save Him.

The knowledge of saints is, thus, akin to that of prophets, insofar as its source is God, but it is at the same time distinct from it, insofar as they achieve it intentionally, by exercises, like the diviners. Besides, since their knowledge is not necessary, and is intended, they need to be guided in order to be able to achieve it.

Among those who are capable of attaining degrees of sainthood there are also people who are insane. But their insanity refers only to the loss of intellect; they are not like the people who are really mad, because, unlike them, their soul (*nafs nāṭiqā*) is intact, and

⁷¹ *Shifā’ al-sā’it*: 57. The last statement, namely “it is appropriate to keep the secrets of God” can be understood in the light of the idea that “the secrets of creation and the art of maintaining omnipotence are... correlative, and both the exclusive preserve of God...” (Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 95).

⁷² *Shifā’ al-sā’it*: 61.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 60.

“God may endow a man with whatever He wants, if the soul of the latter is intact”.⁷⁴

In his *Shifā' al-sā'il* Ibn Khaldūn talks about people who are possessed by God (*majdhūb*) and they seem to be of the same type as the aforementioned insane people. The difference is that the cause for their insanity is the obsession with God (*ishtighāl bi rab-bihī*), which is the reason why they forget about their own selves and, like the previous ones, do not have legal majority (*taklīf*), since the intellect of a legally mature person is a practical, pragmatic one (*'aql al-ma'āsh*), the loss of which does not suppose inability to achieve divine inspiration. Moreover, if one “loses this intellect, he drowns in the sea of divine light, because he becomes less occupied with sensual perceptions”.⁷⁵

Consequently, stating that these insane people, despite their loss of legal majority, are nevertheless capable of attaining degrees of sainthood, Ibn Khaldūn once more shows the non-social character of sainthood, since saintly knowledge, as mentioned above, does not enter into the divine economy of social well-being, and therefore a saint can be one who is unable to live a socially full life, being deprived of the pragmatic intellect.

Divination

There are, finally, the diviners, who are capable of achieving supernatural knowledge. These are divided into two categories. The first one, which is higher, is called *kuhhān* (plural of *kāhīn*). Their souls are “inclined to move towards supernatural perception, but are incapable of it”.⁷⁶ The source of this kind of knowledge according to Ibn Khaldūn, are the devils. Besides, the author introduces here the idea of imagination. Since the *kuhhān* “are more apt to perceive the particulars rather than the general ideas, their imagination is very developed, because it is the device of the particulars”.⁷⁷ They very often resort to rhythmic prose (*saj'*), which helps

⁷⁴ *Muqaddima*: 111. In the Iranian folk tradition this kind of insane people, usually those who suffer from epilepsy, are called *'oqalā-ye majānīn*, i.e. “insane clever men”; they are considered to be even sacred, as they belong, according to folk beliefs, to the spiritual world. Although they are strange, often violating social norms and customary laws, their souls are blameless having direct access to the divine knowledge, and they are completely deprived of material strivings.

⁷⁵ *Shifā' al-sā'il*: 88.

⁷⁶ *Muqaddima*: 100.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*: 100. The notion of imagination here is represented by Ibn Khaldūn somewhat differently than when he was describing the capacities of perception of human soul (see

them to become abstracted from bodily senses and at least “to some extent” to become connected to the spiritual realm, but since the knowledge attained by this connection is imperfect, it may sometimes by accident be truthful and sometimes false. The knowledge of this type of diviners is partial also because one part of it consists of “demonic inspirations, and the other part is from themselves, and... [it is proved] that the knowledge, which each demon possesses, is not identical to that of the other demons”,⁷⁸ i.e. they may inspire the diviner different things each, leading him into confusion.

The lower type of diviners are the *‘arrāfūn* (plural of *‘arrāf*). These, in order to lift “the veil of the senses”, resort to different means, for example, looking into transparent bodies, such as mirrors, water and the internal organs of animals, and following the flight of birds,⁷⁹ professing geomancy (*khaṭṭ al-raml*),⁸⁰ *zajr*,⁸¹ and so on. A very intricate technique of sand divination is the *zā’irja*, which is a table drawn in the form of seven circles, with the use of letters, the signs of the Zodiac, etc., being thus a mixture of letter magic and astrology.⁸² Accordingly, this type of diviners is inferior to the *kuhhān* because they need many different means, whereas a *kāhin* does not need much. “Persons who gaze into transparent

above). He states that the imagination brings the particulars in front of the eyes of the diviner, and the latter looks into it “as if it were a mirror” drawing his predictions from it.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: 101.

⁷⁹ I.e. ornithomancy (see Fahd, *op.cit.*: 432-446).

⁸⁰ See *Ibid.*: 196-204; for a study of Islamic geomancy and the critique of the extant literature on it, see M. B. Smith, “The Nature of Islamic Geomancy with a Critique of Structuralist’s Approach”, *Studia Islamica* 49 (1979): 5-38: “... Ibn Khaldūn regarded the geomantic figures as having value only as visual objects, on which the geomancer could focus his concentration so as to gain supernatural perception...”.

⁸¹ *Muqaddima*: 107: “*Zajr* is [a sort of divination]... which is done by thinking about an animal or a bird after meeting it, and after it is gone...” . Fahd gives a different description of *zajr*: “En effet, à l’origine, le *zajr*... consistait à lancer un caillou contre un oiseau et à crier contre lui. Si l’oiseau volait à droite du *zājir*, ce dernier en tirait bon présage (*taḥā’ala bihi*), s’il volait à gauche, il en tirait un mauvais présage (*taṭayyara*)” (Fahd, *op. cit.*: 438).

⁸² *Muqaddima*: 116-119; Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 1: 245; see also Fahd, *op. cit.*: 243-245. Nearly four centuries after Ibn Khaldūn, Edward William Lane described a similar divination technique in Egypt, called in the same way: “The Muslims have recourse to many superstitious practices to determine them when they are in doubt as to any action which they contemplate, whether they shall do it or not. Some apply, for the answer, to a table called *zā’irgeh*. There is a table of this kind ascribed to Idris or Enoch. It is divided into hundred little squares, in each of which is written some Arabic letter. The person who consults it, repeats, three times, the opening chapter of the Qur’an, and the 59th verse of the sura al-An’ām (or the 6th chapter)... Having done this, without looking directly at the table, he places his finger upon it: he then looks to see upon what letter his is placed; writes that letter; the fifth following it; the fifth following this; and so on, until he comes again to the first which he wrote; and these letters together compose the answer” (Edward William Lane, *The Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians*, London, 1923: 266).

bodies, such as mirrors, bowls, or water, and [examine] the hearts, livers, and bones of animals, as well as those who cast pebbles and [date] pits, all belong to the class of soothsayers. Only, they are constitutionally less well fitted for supernatural perception than soothsayers (*kuhhān*). The soothsayer does not need to make much of an effort in order to lift the veil of sensual perception. They, however, expend much effort to concentrate all sensual perception in one particular sense, the noblest one, which is vision".⁸³

Thus, the *'arrāfūn* are inferior to the *kuhhān* because their knowledge is mediated by bodily perceptions, and for the author of the *Muqaddima* this knowledge is inferior to the one achieved without corporeal sentiments.⁸⁴ In fact, by being capable of spiritual knowledge, although it originates from an evil source, the *kuhhān* "participent à la nature prophétique",⁸⁵ being, therefore, superior to the other type of diviners. Superiority of revealed knowledge to human knowledge, as well as the impossibility of all-embracing human knowledge at all, is explicitly stated by Ibn Khaldūn in the chapter on the refutation of alchemy and astrology.⁸⁶ The all-embracing knowledge is impossible for men also because the secrets of creation and the art of maintaining omnipotence are both the exclusive privilege of God.

Consequently, the knowledge of an *'arrāf* is inferior to that of a *kāhin* in the same way as the knowledge of a learned man is inferior to that of a prophet.

The distinction between the *kuhhān* and the *'arrāfūn* for Ibn Khaldūn does not have any social significance; it is merely epistemological. The first one can be classified as "possession divination", the other as "wisdom divination".⁸⁷

Social Motives

Ibn Khaldūn, when talking about the role of prophecy and repudiating divination, has social motives, although he does not explic-

⁸³ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 1: 216. The author further brings in other means used by diviners, such as fumigation, most probably with drugs, incantations, etc.

⁸⁴ *Muqaddima*: 106.

⁸⁵ E. Doutté, *Magie et religion dans l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1994): 418.

⁸⁶ *Muqaddima*: 519, 524.

⁸⁷ "Wisdom divination" is that "in which the diviner decodes impersonal patterns of reality" (Evan Zuesse, *op. cit.*); see also Fahd, *op. cit.*: 113: "La place qu'occupe le *'arrāf*, dans la tradition et folklore arabes, pousse certains auteurs à établir une distinction formelle entre le *'arrāf* et le *kāhin*: le premier est inférieur au second; car le *kāhin* pratiquait à la fois la divination intuitive et la divination inductive, alors que le *'arrāf* se limitait à cette dernière".

itly pronounce his views on this subject. The opposition prophet—diviner can be viewed as the opposition social welfare—social harm, besides being merely theological, licit—illicit, depending on the source of their knowledge. As mentioned above, the knowledge of a prophet has a social function, to lead people towards the truth and keep them away from sins, and cannot be viewed as purely individual, belonging to him only. It, in fact, belongs to the whole mankind, since most people by their nature are incapable of perceiving what is beyond the primary intelligibles, and therefore, need prophetic guidance. The miracles performed by a prophet also have this function: they serve to prove the people that a prophet is truthful. Such are, for instance, the miracles of Moses. When the sorcerers of the Pharaoh started converting their cords and staffs into serpents, Moses threw his staff onto the ground and it, also becoming a serpent, devoured them, making the sorcerers and people believe in his mission. Or, he put his hand into his bosom and took it out completely white.⁸⁸

Meanwhile a diviner is socially harmful. Ibn Khaldūn speaks about social harm elsewhere, while refuting astrology and alchemy. The refutation of astrology, as something leading to social harm, can be well applied to all kinds of divination, for astrology is a sort of divination itself. Besides being false from a scientific point of view, it is also “harmful for human civilization in the way that it makes people foster some false hopes, [and even] if by accident it turns out to be true, it is not based on causal necessity... and from these false beliefs emerge enmity, and people start to think about revolting against the state... and it is necessary that this art becomes forbidden for all the people because there emerges [also] harm for religion”.⁸⁹

Ibn Khaldūn devoted two parts of his *Muqaddima* to the refutation of eschatological divination (*jafī*), which is done by astrology-

⁸⁸ Here is a description of the miracle performed by Moses by al-Ṭabarī: “Moses... threw his staff from his hand. It faced their cords and staves that they had thrown which were running serpents to the eyes of Pharaoh and the people—and began to overtake and swallow them, serpent by serpent... Then Moses grabbed it, and it became his staff in his hand, as it had been previously. Then the sorcerers were cast down prostrating, saying: *We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses. If this were sorcery, it would not have overcome us*” (*The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 3, *The Children of Israel*, trans. William M. Brinner, New York, 1991: 58).

⁸⁹ *Muqaddima*: 522; see also Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn*: 115: “the refutations are all based on a basic idea, that these crafts run against the nature of things: against the nature of human intellect, against the nature of properties of matter, and against the truth, and therefore nature, of dogma”.

cal and numerological methods.⁹⁰ After representing the matter of several traditions of the adherents of the Fāṭimī Messiah (Mahdī), and refuting them from the point of view of their weak chains of transmitters, the author adds that the predictions about the advent of the Messiah are harmful for society. Ibn Khaldūn states the fact that “one of the qualities of the human soul is the desire to learn the outcome of affairs that concern (human beings) and to know what is going to happen to them, whether it will be life or death, good or evil”.⁹¹ Therefore, they often resort to the “sort of people who make their living by this art [of predicting] since they are familiar with the passion of people for it”.⁹² Most of these people, according to the author, do make predictions by contemplating astral conjunctions. In fact, those who are most interested in the predictions of these people are the kings and princes, who want to know about the future of their states. This is the reason why in their states “the attention paid to the learned becomes lesser”.⁹³ According to Ibn Khaldūn, this is harmful for society. In another place he speaks about disturbances that occurred because of such predictions. He tells, for instance, how at the beginning of the eighth century A.H. in Maghrib a certain man, a Sufi, whose name was al-Tuwayzirī, proclaimed himself to be the awaited Fāṭimī Messiah, and gained many followers, disturbing the affairs of the state.

Here we have not merely a theological distinction between a diviner and a prophet, but also a sociological one. Although both sharing in some sense in nature of their knowledge, which is inspired by supernatural beings,⁹⁴ they differ in respect of its content

⁹⁰ See *Muqaddima*, parts 52 and 53, chapter 3. This is the so called “Omen astrology”, in which “...one passed judgements on the future of kingdoms, nations, and at times the whole world. One studied the appearance of shooting stars, comets, and the conjunctions of major planets, especially those of Saturn and Jupiter, in order to predict the future from their timing and behaviour” (George Saliba, “The Role of Astrologer in Medieval Islamic Society”, *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 44, 1992: 57).

⁹¹ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 2: 200.

⁹² *Muqaddima*: 330.

⁹³ *Ibid.*: 330.

⁹⁴ Cf. “... dans une pensée monothéiste, le démon est également un envoyé; la source de son message est celle même du message de l’ange; seul le contenu en est différent” (Fahd, *op.cit.*: 69). Thus, both being inspired by an “envoyé”, the knowledge of a prophet and the knowledge of a diviner have a common nature, that is, are not acquired by sensory perceptions or logical discourse. Also cf. “Participent de ce *Ghayb* des privilèges auxquels Dieu octroie la connaissance de certains de ses mystères, les imams chiïtes, les mystiques, les pieux, mais aussi ceux dont la nature est douée de certains pouvoirs que le commun des gens n’a pas: les devins, les magiciens, les astrologues qui parviennent à percer les mystères de la connaissance, avec ou sans la permission de Dieu” (Fahd, “La connaissance de l’inconnaissable et l’obtention de l’impossible dans la pensée magique et magique de

and its functions. The diviner is the contrary of the prophet not only insofar as his inspiration comes from a devil, but also because he plays a socially negative role, unlike the prophet.⁹⁵

Fazlur Rahman states that Ibn Khaldūn in “his account of prophecy seeks to reconcile the orthodox and the rationalists’ claims and attempts to rationalise the supernaturalism of the orthodox kalām”. Indeed, sharing the views of the orthodox al-Bāqillānī concerning the matters of theological explanations of prophecy, Ibn Khaldūn at the same time tries to give a natural-scientific explanation to them, trying to explain some properties of the prophet by the ability of his soul to move along the Chain of Being. However, in his account on prophecy and divination he combines these explanations with distinctions based, as we saw, on the significance of these phenomena for human society.

THE REFUTATION OF THE OCCULT SCIENCES

Magic and Talismanic Art

In the last chapter of his *Muqaddima* Ibn Khaldūn devoted a special section to the “sciences” of sorcery and talismans. Magic is regarded by him as the capacity of human beings to influence the world of elements by supernatural means. This may be done with or without the help of supernatural powers. “These are sciences showing how human souls may become prepared to exercise an influence upon the world of the elements, either without any aid or with the aid of celestial matters”.⁹⁶

This division of the types of magic by the Arab thinker is natural-scientific, since it designates the capacities of the human soul, and theological, since it also shows the role that it plays with regard to the sacred powers. There are two main types of magic as represented by Ibn Khaldūn. The first one could be conventionally called illicit, the second one licit, although he does not use these terms explicitly. The types of magic where man plays a rela-

l’Islam”, *Bulletin d’Etudes Orientales* 44, 1993: 33). Accordingly, diviners actually share the nature of prophets in what refers the source of their knowledge; only their ways of attaining it are different.

⁹⁵ Cf. “... entre le *kāhin* et le *nabī*, il n’y a pas d’autre différence que celle que nous avons trouvée entre la sorcellerie et la religion; c’est une différence d’ordre juridique; le Prophète est un devin inspiré par Dieu et le devin est un prophète inspiré par le diable, les génies, les esprits: l’un est mauvais, l’autre est bon...” (Doutté, *op.cit.*: 418).

⁹⁶ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 156.

tively active role, as in the case of conjuring demons, or using the powers of planets, etc., are definitely viewed by Ibn Khaldūn as being illicit, whereas the types of magic where the influence of man on nature occurs due to divine intervention or natural predisposition of the soul (*fiṭra*), are viewed as licit, or at least are not condemned by him. In fact, some kinds of magic are closer to being licit, and some are less so, because, apart from being more harmful or less, they also are such due to acting upon the supernatural powers more actively or less. Thus, if we admit the “licitness” and “illicitness” as two opposite poles, then, the more active is role one assumes with regard to the supernatural beings, which endow him with magical power, the closer he is to the pole of “illicitness”, and on the contrary, the more passive is his role, the closer is the magician to the pole of “licitness”.

However, the distinction is also based on the significance of the specific type of magic for human society, on whether its role is positive or negative, and to what extent;⁹⁷ in fact, all the refutations of the occult sciences are based on the criterion of significance of the science for society. There is also a natural-scientific division, which is made already within these categories.

Ibn Khaldūn classifies the types of magic according to the capacities of the human soul, since human souls are different in their properties, and “each kind is distinguished by a particular quality, which does not exist in any other kind (of soul)”.⁹⁸ The highest level of magicians, he argues, are those who can influence the world of elements without any external means or help, only

⁹⁷ On the difference between religion and magic, see Sylvain Matton: “L’homme religieux se prosterne devant les puissances divines et les implore, l’homme magique se dresse en face d’elles et les veut contraindre... le moment magique est cet instant privilégié ou le transcendant s’incline...” (Sylvain Matton, *La magie arabe traditionnelle. Ibn Khaldun, la magie et science des talismans, Al Kindi, des rayons ou théorie des arts magiques, Ibn Wahshiya, la connaissance des alphabets occultes dévoilée; Picatrix, le but des sages dans la magie*, Bibliotheca Hermetica. Introduction et notes bibliographiques de Sylvain Matton, Paris, 1977: 22). Indeed, the sorcerer is the one who tries to act upon the sacred, to use its powers for his own purposes; even the fact that sometimes he humiliates himself in front of them does not diminish the fact that he “uses” them; whereas the prophet acts upon the world of elements by the help of God, being in fact a mere intermediary between God and men, his role in this process being very passive. This scheme resembles the one drawn by Frazer, in his distinction between magic and religion: religion for this author is “a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life”, whereas the magician possesses “haughty self-sufficiency” and an “arrogant demeanour towards the higher powers, and... unabashed claim to exercise a sway like theirs...” (James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, London, 1990: 50, 52).

⁹⁸ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 157.

through their mental effort (*himma*).⁹⁹ This is the most “active” type of magicians, since they do not resort to any external powers or means to achieve their ends, but rely only on the capacities of their soul. Therefore, these, who can otherwise be called sorcerers, are regarded by Ibn Khaldūn as the most powerful type, and superior to other types of magicians.

If our classification of magic according to “activeness” is correct, they, being the most active ones, are the closest to the definition of being illicit. And although they sometimes use the power of evil spirits by conjuring and even worshipping them,¹⁰⁰ still their role can be seen as dominant. They make use of those spirits, and therefore, are not passive.

Ibn Khaldūn enumerates several kinds of sorcery, some of which the author, as he states himself, has witnessed with his own eyes.¹⁰¹ He describes, for instance, a kind of homeopathic magic (to use Frazer’s term),¹⁰² when the sorcerer creates the image of the supposed victim and then performs magical acts over it, by spitting on it, making knots, pronouncing certain spells over the image, etc. His spittle is supposed to produce evil spirits, which are then supposed to harm the victim. Another type of sorcerers are those who point at a piece of leather or garment, which is then torn apart, or point at the bellies of animals, which then likewise are ripped open. These are called *ba’-‘ājūn*.¹⁰³ Ibn Khaldūn mentions some

⁹⁹ Acting upon remote objects is represented also by Avicenna: “... the intelligible forms stored in the active intellect will appear to [man] instantaneously and thus he will apprehend without effort or discourse matters that others apprehend only discursively, through the assistance of a teacher. To bear this supposition out, it is enough to note the kinship between the intelligible forms and the human Soul, both equally immaterial in nature and yet capable of some manner of association with matter. The Soul, which normally acts upon the body as its circumscribed province, might nevertheless go beyond that province and act upon the remoter regions of matter, causing motion or rest, heating or cooling, hardening or softening in them, as well as the consequent phenomena of lightning, earthquakes, rain, wind, etc.” (*apud* Fakhry, *op.cit.*: 164).

¹⁰⁰ “*Bi anwā’ al ta’dhīm wa al-‘ibāda*” (see *Muqaddima*: 498).

¹⁰¹ *Muqaddima*: 500.

¹⁰² Or, initiative magic, as in Russian anthropology (see, e.g. С. А. Токарев, *Ранние формы религии*, Москва, 1990: 427 et sq.).

¹⁰³ Plural of *ba’-‘āj*, which is derived from the stem “*b’j*” “to tear”, and means “the one who tears”. This type of magical acts, when the sorcerer tries to act upon his victim by pointing at him, is called *Anfangszauberei*, in Russian tradition *initsial’naya magiya*, “initial”, or “starting magic”, when the magical act is directed towards the victim himself, but because of his remoteness, only the beginning of the action is performed by the sorcerer, the rest of which is supposed to be accomplished by the magical power (see С. А. Токарев, *op.cit.*: 427). On various types of magical procedures among the Extreme Shi’ite population of Western Iran, see Mushegh Asatrian, “A Manual of Iranian Folk Magic”, *Iran and the Caucasus*, vol. V, 2001: 163-182.

treatise called *al-Khazīriya*,¹⁰⁴ which contains prescriptions how to exercise magical power over objects other than free men (i.e. slaves), in other words, everything that can be possessed, bought and sold.¹⁰⁵

The second degree of magic is talismanic art. Here the one who wants to influence the external world resorts to the powers of planets and heavenly spheres, and the properties of numbers. This kind of magic “exercises its influence with the aid of the temper of the spheres and the elements, or with the aid of the properties of numbers. This is called talismans. It is weaker in degree than the first [kind]”.¹⁰⁶

Ibn Khaldūn describes several types of talismans. Such are the “lion seal”, when on a thimble there is drawn a “picture of a lion dragging its tail and biting on pebbles” with a snake “coiled at the lion’s feet stretching upwards opposite the lion’s head...”.¹⁰⁷ The person who makes this talisman, while doing it waits for a certain astral conjunction of the constellation of Leo and the sun. This spell is used for influencing rulers. Then there is a talisman, which is made by using the properties of the so-called “loving numbers” (*al-a’dād al-mutaḥābba*) which are 220 and 284, with the help of which one can increase the mutual love of two persons.¹⁰⁸ Finally, “...there is the magic square of thirty-six fields that belongs to the sun. It has been said that it should be made when the sun enters its exaltation and is out of its misfortune, and when the moon is well and under a royal ascendant in which the master of the tenth (house) is considered to look upon the master of the ascendant lovingly and invitingly and in which exalted indications concerning royal nativities prosper. It is preserved in a yellow silk rag, after having been dipped in perfume. [People] think that it influences one’s friendship with rulers and one’s [opportunity] to serve them and to be admitted”.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ *Muqaddima*: 500. In Rosenthal’s translation it is called *al-Khinzīriya*; see Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 165.

¹⁰⁵ The criteria of Toufic Fahd in his classification of magic into licit or natural, on the one hand, and illicit, on the other, are unclear to me, and seem to be confused, since he places some of the types of magic, such as *al-Khinzīriya*, the one exercised by *ba’ājūn*, under the category of licit, or natural magic (“La magie blanche ou naturelle”), whereas they definitely belong to the category of black magic, having as the source of their power neither divine help, nor the natural properties of some objects, but simply the help of spirits or the spiritual power of the magician (Toufic Fahd, “Le monde du sorcier en Islam”, *Sources orientales*, vol. 7, Paris, 1966: 187).

¹⁰⁶ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 158.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*: 163.

¹⁰⁸ *Muqaddima*: 499.

¹⁰⁹ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 163-164.

In this way, talismanic art is inferior to sorcery insofar as it is weaker, and the role of the one who professes this art is more passive with regard to the sacred powers that he uses.¹¹⁰

Ibn Khaldūn, while admitting the existence of magic on naturalistic grounds,¹¹¹ repudiates it by bringing in both theological and social arguments. The magician, he argues, uses in his actions a power other than that of God. Therefore, it is to be condemned. "Now, the sorcerer possesses his particular quality in potentiality... It is transformed... into actuality by exercise. All magical exercise consists of directing oneself to the spheres, the stars, the higher worlds, or to the devils by means of various kinds of veneration and worship and submissiveness and humiliation. Thus, magical exercise is devotion and adoration directed to [beings] other than God. Such devotion is unbelief. Therefore, sorcery is unbelief, or unbelief forms a part of the substance and motives of sorcery, as has been seen. Consequently, [sorcerers must be killed]".¹¹²

Sorcery, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is extremely harmful for the society. That is why it is forbidden by religious law. In fact, he regards sorcery and talismanic art as the same case, for their harmfulness. And his main distinction between magic and miracle is different from that of philosophers, who see this difference only in natural scientific terms, i.e. the prophet performing his miracles with the help of God, and the sorcerer performing his magic with the help of his own spiritual power and with the aid of demons.

¹¹⁰ R. Lemay argues that, according to Ibn Khaldūn, sorcery (*sihr*) is to be more tolerated than talismanic art since the former can be viewed as a kind of natural magic because it utilises the natural powers of the soul, whereas talismanic art is completely condemnable since they "s'appuient sur l'aide des 'esprits' supérieurs" (R. Lemay, "L'Islam historique et les sciences occultes", *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 44, 1992: 25). Cf. also "Il attribue aux praticiens des talismans des intentions exclusivement mauvaises et condamnables selon la *sharʿa*, tandis que les praticiens du *sihr*, qui ne font appel qu'aux *puissances naturelles de l'âme*, paraissent mieux tolérés" (*ibid.*, 26). This conception seems arguable, since although a sorcerer resorts to the power of his soul, he is not viewed by Ibn Khaldūn as a practitioner of natural magic, the latter being rather letter magic. Moreover, Ibn Khaldūn states that talismanic art is "weaker" than sorcery (see *Muqaddima*: 498). Therefore it is even less evil, and besides, although having stated that sorcery resorts to the powers of the soul, in his descriptions of magical acts, Ibn Khaldūn nevertheless says that some of them are performed with the aid of demonic powers. Therefore, it cannot be viewed as natural magic. Besides, there is ambivalence between using the natural powers of one's soul and the natural powers of letters or some similar objects. In the first case, even if using exclusively the natural power of his soul, the sorcerer still remains the active agent of the magical act, whereas in the second case the role of the magician is more passive. He simply "helps" the properties of the letters to exert their influence in certain direction.

¹¹¹ "It should be known that no intelligent person doubts the existence of sorcery, because of the influence mentioned, which sorcery exercises" (Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 159).

¹¹² Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 159.

Ibn Khaldūn states that for him this difference lies in obvious signs, which are the predisposition of a prophet towards good, and doing good, and the predisposition of a magician towards evil, and towards harming people.¹¹³

However, the difference between these two can also be seen in the light of the idea of activeness and passiveness with regard to supernatural powers. The magician is one who occupies an utterly active role, conjuring and commanding evil spirits, or using the power of planets for his own purposes, whereas the role of the prophet with regard to the power by which he performs his miracles, namely God, is utterly passive. In fact, all the miracles which are done by a prophet are performed in reality by God.¹¹⁴

The third type of magic mentioned by Ibn Khaldūn is prestidigitation (*sha'wadha* or *sha'badha*). It is illusory, since the one who performs it does not really affect the outer world, but merely acts upon the imagination of people, making them believe that they see some objects which in reality do not exist. "The third [kind] exercises its influence upon the powers of imagination. The person who exercises this kind of influence relies upon the powers of imagination. He plants among them different sorts of phantasms, images, and pictures... Then, he brings them down to the level of sensual perception of the observers with the help of the power of his soul that exercises an influence over that [sensual perception]. As a result, the [phantasms, etc.] appear to the observers to exist in the external world, while, in fact, there is nothing..."¹¹⁵

Prestidigitation is illusory, since the person who occupies himself with it does not really exert any influence over the world of elements, by whatever means.¹¹⁶ It entails, of course, some use of one's spiritual powers, but it is very limited and is directed merely to creating phantasmal images. Thus, it is not real both because no external powers are involved in it and because its influence is illusory: it does not really change anything in the world of elements.

A special place in Ibn Khaldūn's outlook on magic and the occult is occupied by certain phenomena considered as natural or white magic. The grading of types of magic according to the ac-

¹¹³ *Muqaddima*: 502.

¹¹⁴ In al- Bāqillānī's view, miracle is something which is performed by God alone, the prophet being simply an intermediary between Him and the people (Al- Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, § 54 et passim).

¹¹⁵ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 158.

¹¹⁶ Al-Bāqillānī says that *sha'wadha* is mere deception of people by different technical means, such as filling silk with mercury, thus making people think that this is a snake which is creeping (Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, § 82).

tiveness or passiveness of the actor with regard to the sacred powers, which was proposed above, should be studied here as well. The *evil eye*, which Ibn Khaldūn discusses in the section on magic, deserves special attention. Although it cannot be regarded as white magic, neither is it included by the author into the category of *sīmyā*.¹¹⁷ However, the author's description of this type of magical influence and his attitude towards it makes me consider it as a sort of natural magic. This is what Ibn Khaldūn says with regard to it: "Another psychic influence is that of the eye—that is, an influence exercised by the soul of the person who has the evil eye. A thing or situation appears pleasing to the eye of a person, and he likes it very much. This [circumstance] creates in him envy and the desire to take it away from its owner. Therefore, he prefers to destroy him. It is a natural gift... The difference between it and the [other] psychic influences is that it appears (and acts) as something natural and innate... It does not depend on the free choice of its possessor. It is not acquired by him".¹¹⁸

Accordingly, the harm caused by the evil eye is something which is not willed by its possessor (*mi'yān*). It is not "acquired"¹¹⁹ and occurs simply because of the properties of human soul, and therefore, the person is not responsible for what happens. Having thus the influence of his own eyes as a "natural gift", which does not depend on his free choice, he occupies quite a passive role with regard to the magical powers which are in action; therefore, despite the negative influence of his evil eye, its possessor is not viewed as a sorcerer. In this respect the influence of evil eye can be regarded as some kind of natural magic, or at least, as possessing some degree of "naturalness", since the powers in action are active by themselves, because of their own nature, without any control on

¹¹⁷ This term is used by Ibn Khaldūn for indicating the natural magic, the so-called "letter magic", discussed below.

¹¹⁸ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 170-171.

¹¹⁹ The doctrine of acquisition (*kasb*) is proposed by al-Ash'arī, according to which God creates the acts and we simply acquire them. (Gardet, and Anawati, *op.cit.*: 57-58; see also Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology*: 157-158).

the part of their possessor.¹²⁰ It is thus their nature that makes the eye exert its influence.¹²¹

Therefore, the possessor of the evil eye, having no part in the harm made by himself, is not considered as subject to punishment by religious law: "...it has been said: 'A person who kills by means of sorcery or a miraculous act must be killed, but the person who kills with the eye must not be killed'. The only reason for the [distinction] is that the [person who kills with the eye] did not want or intend to do so, nor could he have avoided doing so. The application [of the eye] was involuntary on his part".¹²²

Although the evil eye can do harm to people, it is not viewed by Ibn Khaldūn as a social fact, occurring independently of peoples' will and being, therefore, perceived as some kind of natural phenomenon. Consequently, the possessor of the evil eye could not be viewed as subject to punishment.

Ibn Khaldūn's outlook on real white magic is reflected in his *Shifā' al-sā'il*,¹²³ where he describes the magic of letters.¹²⁴ This type of magic is characterised as natural because it relies on the natural properties of letters and the names of God. It is called *sīmyā'*.¹²⁵ The proponents of this art, Ibn Khaldūn says, claim that

¹²⁰ Belief in the involuntary nature of the evil caused by the evil eye in Morocco is shown by E. Westermarck ("The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs", *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 34, 1904: 211). See also Brian Spooner, "The Evil Eye in the Middle East", *The Evil eye*, ed. Clarence Maloney, New York, 1976: 77: "In some accounts it is an independent evil power that acts through certain people and in certain situations...". See also Doutté, *op.cit.*: 219-220.

¹²¹ From ancient times the evil eye has always been subject to close examination in various philosophical circles. The natur-philosophers of Late Antiquity, particularly Plutarch (*Quaestiones convivales*, V, 7), interpreted the afflictions caused by the evil eye (βασκανία) with the theory of the so called "outflow", or "emanation" (ἀπορροίαι). According to this theory, human body (as well as anything else) emanates, or outflows, invisible particles constituting the main basis for perception of things, including eyesight and seeing. As eyes are the essential source, or channel, of emanation from human body, they directly affect any subject if their possessor exerts special interest towards it, causing harm and destruction. See also M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, Bd. 2, München, 1961: 412.

¹²² Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 171.

¹²³ *Shifā' al-sā'il*: 47-56.

¹²⁴ In fact, the description of letter magic can be found in Rosenthal's translation of *Muqaddima*, but the edition of *Muqaddima* which I possess lacks this part; therefore, I will rely on the description given in the *Shifā' al-sā'il*. These two versions of the exposition of this topic in fact, do not differ except in some minor details. Again, Fahd's definition of letter magic and that of the divine names as "magie noire", seems a wrong statement (see Fahd, *op.cit.*: 181). On the sacred properties of numbers in Islamic culture, see Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (Oxford, 1993).

¹²⁵ See Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 361-362: "Neben *sihr*... wird der Begriff *sīmyā'* verwendet. Das Wort ist über das syrische *sīmyā'* aus dem griechischen σημεῖον, σημεῖα entstanden und ist im Laufe der Zeit in vielen verschiedenen Bedeutungen verwendet worden, die von „Zeichen“, „Buchstabe“, „magischer Character“, „natürliche Magic“, „Phantasmagorie“ bis hin zu

the names of God (resp. the ninety nine epithets of God), and the letters of the alphabet bear in them the influence of certain spiritual powers, the knowledge of which can give its possessor power over the world of the elements. “[They claim that]... the properties of the letters and their secrets are active in the names [of God] and the worlds from the Creation, moving in them from stage to stage [and they can tell us about] their secrets... [and] the divine spirits act in the world of nature through the Divine Names and Godly words, which are composed from [these] letters that encompass the secrets existing in the worlds”.¹²⁶

As the most important authors who have written on this topic, Ibn Khaldūn mentions the names of Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Būnī.¹²⁷ Some of them, states Ibn Khaldūn, claim that these letters are divided according to the four elements (fire, air, water and earth), certain letters being attributed by their properties to one of these elements. In this way, these letters are supposed to have influence according to the properties of these elements. For instance, those belonging to the element of fire are used for curing cold diseases and increasing the temperature, the letters belonging to the element of water are used for curing fever, etc. Also the numerical value of the letters is used for magical purposes.¹²⁸

Ibn Khaldūn admits the possibility of this kind of magic, saying that “the effect of these letters and the names which are composed from them in the world of nature... is a fact that cannot be denied, since it has been transmitted by the tradition”.¹²⁹ Although admitting the possibility of the influence of the properties of letters and so on, he says that, in fact, what happens during this kind of magic is in reality divine revelation, which occurs after exercise and concentration, namely-divine light and aid, enabling one to master nature.¹³⁰ Actually, this type of magic in reality, as admitted by Ibn Khaldūn, must be considered as wonder, rather than magic, since

„okkulten Eigenschaften der Buchstaben des Alphabets“ reichen”. See also Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1992): 9: “... intellectuals in Europe recognised two forms of magic: natural and demonic. Natural magic was not distinct from science. It was the science that dealt with “occult virtues” (or hidden powers) within nature”.

¹²⁶ *Shifā’ al-sā’ik*: 53.

¹²⁷ On al-Būnī see Ullmann, *op.cit.*: 390-391. Al-Būnī was a twelfth-thirteenth century Muslim author who’s main treatise *Shams al-Ma’ārif* deals with number magic, magical squares, names of God, and so on.

¹²⁸ *Shifā’ al-sā’ik*: 53.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*: 54.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

it happens by accident,¹³¹ and is not deliberately willed by anyone. Here we can clearly see parallels with the knowledge of saints, which also occurs by accident and is not intended. Thus, again, the performer of *sīmyā'*, having a very passive role with regard to the powers which are in action, is not condemned as a sorcerer, although the source of his power is not simply God but the spirits of the heavenly spheres. However, it is God alone who enables the magician to exercise his influence over these powers, reducing in this way his role to a mere intermediary between Himself and them. And if the practitioner of this art tries to do the same thing without divine inspiration, "he will be akin to the practitioner of talismans".¹³² This last statement shows us once again that for Ibn Khaldūn the licitness of an occult activity requires that the one who practices it be in a passive role, a mere intermediary between divinity and the world; if he tries to act by himself, he ceases to be good.

Finally, we arrive at the "most licit" type of magic, prophetic miracles.¹³³ Here, the one who performs them, the prophet, appears to be a mere intermediary between God and people, the miracle being performed in its entirety by God.¹³⁴ The prophet's role is, therefore, utterly passive, the main actor here being God only. Mentioning the difference between miracle and magic according to the theologians, Ibn Khaldūn says that they hold it to be the challenge for prophecy. This claim is a means to prove the truthfulness of a prophet by attributing the act of the miracle to the supreme authority, God, assuming thus one's passive role in performing the miracle,¹³⁵ since by their nature miracle and magic can be very similar, and the magician differs from the prophet also by the fact that he acts by his own initiative.

Thus, the gradation of the types of magic, including prophecy, as represented by Ibn Khaldūn, from "licit" to "illicit", according

¹³¹ The expression "By accident" may be interpreted according to the Ash'arite doctrine, as occurring depending "on God's good pleasure" (Fakhry, *op.cit.*: 240) as opposed to an order established again by God, a "character and disposition", a "regularity" in which things happen (Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought*: 9).

¹³² *Shifā' al-sā'il*: 55.

¹³³ Miracles can be called magic in the sense that they also are result of the influence of man over nature by means of supernatural power (cf. compare Doutté, *op.cit.*: 338-339): "la religion est essentiellement morale: or, la morale c'est ce qui est permis par la loi divine car... toutes les actions sont prévues et qualifiées par la loi. Autrement dit, le miracle est une sorcellerie légitime et la sorcellerie est un miracle défendu".

¹³⁴ According to al-Baḳillānī, miracles are out of the scope of the power of the creatures altogether, and it is God alone who performs them (see al-Baḳillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, §§ 6-10, *et passim*).

¹³⁵ See *ibid.*: § 55 *et passim*.

to activeness of the actor in them, has several connotations. One is theological. We can assume that the person who uses the powers of malign spirits for his own purposes can be viewed as “bad” from the religious point of view, since religion means surrender to sublime powers, whereas the magician, on the contrary, tries to rule them for his purposes. That is why his magic is illicit. Conversely, one who is directed by God and obeys Him in all instances., is definitely “good”. The natural-scientific connotation is that the more one uses some powers that are supernatural, the greater is the possibility that he goes contrary to the order established by God, and contrary to nature; yet, sometimes it may be in conformity with nature but contrary to the divine economy; for instance, even if the letters of the alphabet really have some power, it is against the order established by God to use them. Similar is the case with alchemy. Finally, the more independently one acts in the realm of sacred powers, the more harm one can cause to society, because thus he is more independent from God’s command. Conversely, one who is bound with divine order, that is, a prophet, is simply unable to sin.

The Refutation of Alchemy

Ibn Khaldūn defines alchemy as a science which aims at finding a substance that would enable people to make gold and silver from baser metals.¹³⁶ The substance is called Elixir (*al-iksīr*). If it is added to a mineral body, which is heated beforehand, it will transform it into silver or gold: “This is a science that studies the substance through which the generation of gold and silver may be artificially accomplished, and comments on the operation leading to it. The [alchemists] acquire knowledge of the tempers and powers of all created things and investigate them critically. They hope that they may thus come upon the substance that is prepared to [produce gold and silver]. They even investigate the waste matter of animals, such as bones, feathers, hair, eggs, and excrements, not to mention minerals”.¹³⁷ Consisting of body and soul, Elixir is in a

¹³⁶ A brief sketch of Ibn Khaldūn’s views on alchemy is contained in Ullmann’s *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam*: 255. Also, a summary on his refutation of alchemy is Anawati’s “La refutation d’alchimie par Ibn Khaldūn”, *Mélanges d’Islamologie. Volume dédié à la mémoire de Armand Abel*, ed. P. Salmon, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1974): 6-17; Cf. also J.W. Livingston, “Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: A 14th Century Defense Against Astrological Divination and Alchemical Transmutation”, *JAOS*, vol. 91/1, 1971: 96-103.

¹³⁷ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 227.

metaphysically higher position than inanimate nature: hence its capacity to act upon it. This is because the activeness of an agent is superior to the passiveness of an object, in a relationship both causal and involving mutability on the part of the passive object (an inferior status).¹³⁸ Thus, acting upon the objects of the inanimate nature, the Elixir moves them upwards along the Chain of Being, transforming them into more subtle substances: "When some mineral substance, such as lead, tin, or copper, which is prepared, in a manner [and degree] that closely approaches [preparedness] in actuality, for receiving the form of gold or silver, is heated in the fire and some [quantity] of the Elixir is added to it, that substance turns into pure gold".¹³⁹

Ibn Khaldūn quotes the views of the philosophers Avicenna and al-Fārābī on alchemy. The first deems the alchemical transmutation of metals impossible, since the seven malleable minerals, which are gold, silver, lead, tin, copper, iron and zinc,¹⁴⁰ "are utterly distinct from each other, each of which is specifically and individually realised in a distinct species and genus".¹⁴¹ Conversely,

¹³⁸ See Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 80: "The effect of an actor... is that of an external agent in the context of a relationship between activity and passivity, animation and inanimation, loftiness and lowliness. A potency is a principle of change in relation to an external agency of change, and change is invariably inferior to changelessness. Causality is, ultimately, but an instance of hierarchy... it presupposes the superiority, in all senses, of the actor over his object..."

¹³⁹ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 228. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, trans. Stephen Corrin (New York, 1971): 51-52: "The 'nobility' of gold is thus the fruit at its most mature; the other metals are 'common' because they are crude; 'not ripe'. In other words, Nature's final goal is the completion of the mineral kingdom, its ultimate 'maturation'. The natural transmutation of metals into gold is inscribed in their destiny. The tendency of Nature is to perfection. But since gold is the bearer of a highly spiritual symbolism... , it is obvious that a new idea is coming into being: the idea of the part assumed by the alchemist as the brotherly saviour of Nature. He assists Nature to fulfil her final goal, to attain her 'ideal', which is the perfection of its progeny—be it mineral, animal or human—to its supreme ripening...". See also Ullmann, *op.cit.*: 257: "In langen Zeiträumen wachsen die Metalle im Schoß der Erde heran. Langsam wandeln sie sich von den unedlen zu den edlen Metallen, bis sie schließlich zu Gold werden. Diesen Prozeß kann der Alchemist in der Retorte beschleunigen. Er kann das, wozu die Natur tausend Jahre benötigt, durch seine Kunst in einem Tage erreichen. Als Mittel dazu dient ihm das Elixier..."

¹⁴⁰ "Minerals are subterranean products of the various qualitative and quantitative combinations... divided into those of tough constitution, comprising malleable and non-malleable metals, and those of a weak constitution, which are classified as salts and fatty substances. The malleable metals are termed the Seven Bodies comprising gold, silver, zinc, lead, copper, iron and one on whose identity there was no agreement, and they are composed by thorough admixture of water and earth and a cooking of the earth by the water to a degree where a malleable fatty humidity is produced... The Seven Bodies are the Olympians of the mineral realm... The king of the malleables is undoubtedly gold..." (Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 25-26).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 26-27. On Avicenna's views on alchemy, see Ullmann, *op. cit.*: 251-252: "Die Alchemisten seien... außerstande, eine echte Transmutation der Arten durchzuführen...",

al-Fārābī considers alchemy possible because of the oneness of these minerals, “which are of one type”,¹⁴² and all their difference rests in their properties such as moistness or dryness, toughness or softness, and so on.¹⁴³ However, Ibn Khaldūn does not accept Avicenna’s refutation of alchemy. Instead, he offers an epistemological argument¹⁴⁴ resorting thus “to the essentials of all natural philosophy in Arabic thought”.¹⁴⁵

All the composite bodies consist of the four elements (earth, water, air, and fire), and in order to constitute various bodies, these elements must exist in them in different proportions: “...it should be known that every generated elemental thing must contain a combination of the four elements in different proportions. If they were all alike in proportion, no mixture would take place. Therefore, there must always be a part that is superior to all the [others]. Likewise, everything generated through mixture must contain some natural heat which is active in creating it and preserves its form. Furthermore, everything that is created in time must go through different stages and pass from one stage to another during the time of its creation, until it reaches its goal”.¹⁴⁶

The way of the formation of the composite bodies is thus very complicated. Each stage of the composition of the bodies differs from the previous one with regard to the proportions of the elements in it. And in order to be able to transform base metals into gold, the alchemist needs to “emulate nature”,¹⁴⁷ for which he has “to have a detailed knowledge of all the conditions (*aḥwāl*) in which the body is when passing through these stages”.¹⁴⁸ However, “human knowledge is incapable of achieving the knowledge of all

sie können lediglich etwas den Edelmetallen Ähnliches schaffen, das in der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung den Edelmetallen gleicht; jedoch die wesentliche Substanz der unedlen Metalle bleibe erhalten... Es gebe keine Möglichkeit, eine mineralische Konstitution aufzulösen und in eine andere überzuführen...”.

¹⁴² *Muqaddima*: 527.

¹⁴³ On al-Fārābī’s views on alchemy, see Ullmann, *op. cit.*: 250: “Die Möglichkeit der Metalverwandlung beruhe im übrigen auf der von Aristoteles im Steinbuch aufgestellten Prämisse, nach der die verschiedenen Arten (*anwā*) der Metalle einer Gattung (*jīns*) angehören. Sie unterschieden sich nur nach wesentlichen (*a’rāḍ dhātīya*) und zufälligen (*a’rā’ḍ ‘aradīya*) Akzidenzien”.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. “Ibn Khaldūn trouve son argument très solide car il n’est pas basé sur l’impossibilité de produire des espèces différentes mais uniquement sur l’impossibilité de posséder une science compréhensive pour l’homme” (Anawati, *op. cit.*: 6-17).

¹⁴⁵ Al-Azmeh, *op. cit.*: 27.

¹⁴⁶ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 275.

¹⁴⁷ *Muqaddima*: 528.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 529.

this".¹⁴⁹ In order to reach its ends, alchemy tries also to emulate nature, the prerequisite for which is absolute knowledge, which, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is impossible. This is because all-embracing knowledge leads to omnipotence, and therefore it is God alone who can have it. And "the exclusive possession of the secrets of things maintains the orders of the universe and guards it against the presumptions of mankind".¹⁵⁰ If a human being succeeds in achieving absolute knowledge, "the wisdom of God will be undermined".¹⁵¹

The next argument is a natural-scientific one. Nature, contemplates Ibn Khaldūn, in order to do something, "always takes the shortest way in what it does. It does not take the longest and the most complicated one. [Now] if, as [the alchemists] suppose, the artificial method were found shorter, and took less time than that which nature follows in the mine, nature would not have abandoned it in favour of the method it has chosen for the generation and creation of gold and silver".¹⁵²

Nature, actually, utilises the shortest possible way of doing anything, and the attempt to do the same thing in a shorter time would mean going contrary to nature, and therefore, it is impossible.¹⁵³

In another argument of the same type Ibn Khaldūn rejects the view that the action of the Elixir over the body resembles the impact of leaven over dough in preparation of bread. Here the case is corruption, and "corruption in substances is easy",¹⁵⁴ whereas the

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 529.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 96.

¹⁵¹ *Muqaddima*: 529. Cf. (Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 95): "... it is the impossibility of such an absolute knowledge that constitutes the crux of refutations of astrology and alchemy... (Ibn Khaldūn) showed no interest in Ibn Sīnā's absolute specification of metals, but... asserted the theoretical possibility of alchemy on their basis, at the same time denying its practical possibility because this would imply the absolute knowledge of all things that would allow alchemy to run a course parallel to that of nature". See also "Ibn Khaldūn ne critique donc l'alchimie que pour mieux montrer les conditions de la connaissance vraie. Les êtres et leurs propriétés se présentent à la pensée; c'est à de découvrir leurs rapports et d'organiser leurs relations. S'il ne nous est pas possible d'agir, de telle ou telle façon, sur les êtres de la nature, c'est parce que nous n'avons pas su les aborder et les serrer convenablement" (Nassar, *op.cit.*: 89).

¹⁵² Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 277.

¹⁵³ "Each specific entity has a specific nature inherent in it... It is an active disposition, a constitution which realises itself through change..." (Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn*: 52). On the matter of "going contrary to Nature", see Eliade, *op.cit.*: "On the mineral level of existence the Stone was realising this miracle: it eliminated the interval of time which separated the present condition of an 'imperfect' (crude) metal from its final condition (when it would become gold). The Stone achieved transmutation almost instantaneously: it superseded Time".

¹⁵⁴ *Muqaddima*: 530.

action of the Elixir is “converting the metal into what is ‘nobler’ (*ashraf*) than it; it is generation... and generation is more difficult than corruption”.¹⁵⁵

Further on, the author bases his refutation on theological grounds. He argues that the art of alchemy is “out of the scope of the positive sciences”.¹⁵⁶ If the alchemist even reaches something with the help of his art, it is either wonder and miracle or magic: “The truth of the matter is that if it is correct that alchemy exists, as philosophers who discuss alchemy..., and others, think, it does not [at any rate] fall under the category of natural crafts, and it does not come about by any technical process. The discussion of alchemy by [alchemists] is not like that of physics [by physicists]. It is like the discussion of magical and other extraordinary matters or the wonders [of saints]...”.¹⁵⁷

But alchemy is condemned by Ibn Khaldūn since it may be regarded also as magic, because “those have succeeded in this art who have dived into the abyss of magic and have experienced the influence of soul over nature and the violating of custom”.¹⁵⁸

Besides, if it were possible to multiply gold and silver by artificial means, the wisdom of God would be undermined, since, by God’s wisdom the value of these metals lies in their rarity, and if multiplied, they would lose it, which would cause harm to people’s wealth.¹⁵⁹ Thus, although having previously admitted the theoretical possibility of alchemy, Ibn Khaldūn denies it altogether, basing his argument on God’s all-encompassing wisdom and His concern for the economic stability of human society.

Finally, Ibn Khaldūn finds alchemy inadmissible for the harm it causes to human society and civilisation. He describes at length what kind of people usually occupy themselves with alchemy, and

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 530.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Azmeh, *op.cit.*: 112: “... the sciences of magic and talisman, of Letters (*al-ḥurūf*), and of alchemy... do not qualify as positive sciences... [but]... are fringe sciences which, while very highly developed and while each has a well-defined paradigmatic space, were officially frowned upon and associated with unsavoury doctrinal, confessional, and social spaces”.

¹⁵⁷ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3, 278; in the Arabic edition of the text which I possess, Ibn Khaldūn adds here some types of wonders, such as “walking on water, flying in the air and penetrating into thick bodies” (*Muqaddima*: 530).

¹⁵⁸ *Muqaddima*: 351. On the question of violating custom, see al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, §§ 57-65. Here the author prescribes the property of breaching custom to miracles, but in this case this may well illustrate what Ibn Khaldūn means, since for al-Bāqillānī miracle and magic do not differ by their nature, the main difference between them being that miracle is such for being accompanied by a challenge for prophecy; therefore, breaching custom can well be applied to magic as well.

¹⁵⁹ *Muqaddima*: 529.

defines their purposes as deceiving people for earning their living: "Theirs is the most contemptible and pernicious profession [there could be]. The forgers conspire to steal the property of the people, for they give copper for silver, and silver for gold, so as to get exclusive possession of [other people's property]. They are thieves and worse than thieves... They... convince rich [Bedouins] that they know how to make gold and silver. People are very much in love with [gold and silver]. They are eager to spend their money to search for them... [The alchemists] must go about their activity fearfully and under the watchful eye [of the authorities]. Eventually, [their] inability [to produce gold and silver] becomes evident and they are disgraced. Then they flee to another place and start the whole business anew... The only way to cure them is for the government to take energetic measures against them, to seize them whenever they are, and to cut off their hands [as thieves]..."¹⁶⁰

Most of the people who are interested in this science, therefore, are the poor, even among the philosophers; that is why, says Ibn Khaldūn, Avicenna, who had a high social position and was wealthy, condemned alchemy, whereas al-Fārābī, who was a poor man, considered alchemy possible.¹⁶¹

Still, there is another type of alchemists who do not intend to deceive people, but really hope to achieve some ends by this art: "...it is possible for us to talk with alchemists who do not like such forgeries, but avoid them and refrain from corrupting the currency and coinage of the Muslims. They merely seek to transform silver into gold, or lead and copper and tin into silver, with the help of particular alchemical process and the Elixir which results from it".¹⁶² Yet, the author states that no person has ever been known to have achieved his ends with the help of this art. And since it is in the nature of man to transmit any knowledge that proves efficient, in the case that someone succeeded in making gold with the help of alchemy, the knowledge of doing it would be transmitted through generations and reach us, while all the stories about alchemists are but fairy tales.¹⁶³

The Refutation of Astrology

¹⁶⁰ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 270.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 531.

¹⁶² Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 271. Cf. also Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. 4, *Alchemie-Chemie, Botanik-Agricultur* (Leiden: Brill, 1971): 7.

¹⁶³ *Muqaddima*: 530.

Speaking on astrology, Ibn Khaldūn first mentions the views of the astrologers themselves on this art. According to him: "Astrologers... [claim] that astrology, with knowledge it gives of astral powers, individually or in combination, and of astral influences upon elemental creations, enables them to know... [the future occurrences before they take place]".¹⁶⁴

Ibn Khaldūn's attitude towards astrology is ambivalent. On the one hand, he admits the possibility of astral influences on earthly events. In the section on prophecy and divination he states that the existence of prophecy is connected with astral conjunctions (*wadʿ falakī*). In order that a prophet appears, there has to be certain conjunction. If this conjunction is perfect, the prophecy will take place, but if it is imperfect, instead of a prophet there will appear diviners.¹⁶⁵

However, although admitting the theoretical possibility of stars having influence on earthly events, as in the case of alchemy he admitted the possibility of a substance that would be able to transform base metals into gold or silver, he nevertheless repudiates the science that would examine these influences and draw conclusions on these grounds.

First, he bases his refutation (again, as in the case of alchemy) on the impossibility of all-encompassing human knowledge.¹⁶⁶ He says that many doctors of this science have argued that the knowledge of the astral powers can be achieved by experience (*tajriba*). "The ancient [astrologers] were of the opinion that the knowledge of astral powers and influence is acquired through experience. It [thus] is something that all [human] lives combined would not be able to achieve, because experience is obtained through numerous repetitions which make the obtainment of [empirical] knowledge or conjectures possible. Astral revolutions may be very long. Greatly extended periods of time are required for their repetition. Even [all] the lives in the world [combined] would be too short for [observing] them".¹⁶⁷

Hence, human life is too short to be able to achieve experimental knowledge about the influence of the celestial bodies.

¹⁶⁴ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 258. For a detailed description of the astrological system in Islam, see Ullmann, *op. cit.*: 345-358. A brief view of the introduction of the astrology to the Arabs is offered by Toufic Fahd in his *La Divination Arabe*: 495-497.

¹⁶⁵ *Muqaddima*: 101-102.

¹⁶⁶ See a brief exposé of Ibn Khaldūn's views on astrology in Ullmann, *op. cit.*: 276.

¹⁶⁷ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 258.

Ibn Khaldūn refers to the view of Ptolemy on the matter of the influence of stars.¹⁶⁸ The latter states that it can be learned with the help of the observation of the impact of the sun and the moon, which is obvious.¹⁶⁹ If we regard the increase or decrease of the power of certain stars during conjunctions,¹⁷⁰ it will give us the key to understanding what kind of influence the star actually has.¹⁷¹ For instance, if the power of the star increases, it means it corresponds to the power of either the sun or the moon, and if it decreases, then, it is contrary to it. Thus, by comparing the powers of separate stars to the powers of the sun and the moon, it is possible to learn them in their entirety.

Denying Ptolemy's views, Ibn Khaldūn, again, does not altogether deny the possibility of the influence of the celestial bodies on earthly events. But this possibility is simply theoretical. He explicitly says that even if astrology were true, no one would be able to achieve the knowledge of it.¹⁷² Ibn Khaldūn rather asserts the uselessness of astrology, basing his argument on natural-scientific grounds. He admits that stars really exert some influence on earthly occurrences, however, there are many other forces that determine the events on earth.¹⁷³ Therefore, one needs the knowledge of all the powers that determine a certain event in order to predict it, to know what else besides the power of the stars determines the occurrence of the event, for which one would have to possess all-encompassing knowledge, which is impossible.¹⁷⁴ Besides, the power of the sun is dominant over the powers of all the other celestial bodies, and it hardly ever increases or decreases depending on the conjunctions of the stars.¹⁷⁵

However, further on the author rejects his own view that stars may really have some power over the terrestrial world. He makes

¹⁶⁸ On Ptolemy and the translations of his works into Arabic, see Ullmann, *op. cit.*: 282-285, and Fuat Sezgin, *op. cit.*, vol. 7 (1979): 41-48.

¹⁶⁹ *Muqaddima*: 520. "He [i.e. Ptolemy] said: ... the activity of sun and moon and their influence upon elemental things are so obvious that no one can deny them. For instance, the sun influences the changes and tempers of the seasons, the ripening of fruits and grains, and so on. The moon influences humidity, the water, the [process] of [putrefaction] in putrescent substances and cucumbers, and so on" (Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 259).

¹⁷⁰ "Konjunktion ist das Zusammentreffen zweier Planeten in einem Grade des Tierkreises bzw. Ihr Aufgehen in einer astrologischen Stunde" (Ullmann, *op. cit.*: 356-357).

¹⁷¹ *Muqaddima*: 520.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*: 522.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*: 521.

¹⁷⁴ The impossibility of the all-encompassing knowledge is determined, first, by the shortness of human life, second, there are also religious motives for it. This knowledge would give men unlimited power, which would undermine the wisdom of God.

¹⁷⁵ *Muqaddima*: 521.

a theological assertion that "... it is wrong to assume that the stars exercise an influence on [the world] below them. It has been proven deductively... that there is no agent but God... [and] the religious law attributes all happenings to the power of God and does not want to have anything to do with anything else".¹⁷⁶

The Oneness of God and His omnipotence are sufficient for the author to reject the possibility of the stars' having any influence whatsoever, just as in the case of alchemy, where he also, having first admitted the theoretical possibility of alchemy, then denies it altogether, when arguing about the Wisdom of God.¹⁷⁷ Ibn Khaldūn then states that astrology has been denied by prophecies:¹⁷⁸ "...[Muhammad] said: 'No eclipse of either sun or moon takes place to indicate the death or life of anybody'". And [God] said: "Some of My servants believe in Me. Others do not. Those who say, 'We had rain through the kindness and mercy of God', believe in Me and do not believe in the stars. Whereas those who say, 'We had rain through such and such constellation,' do not believe in Me, but believe in the stars", [as] the sound tradition [goes]".¹⁷⁹

Another reason, based again in theology, for the repudiation of astrology by Ibn Khaldūn may be the fact that it tends to give people the possibility of total knowledge about the universe,¹⁸⁰ which could run contrary to the order established by God, although this thought is not pronounced explicitly. Here the definition may seem to be epistemological, but it is purely theological, since here the implication is not the impossibility of such "entire knowledge", but the fact that it would "undermine the Wisdom of God". The difference from the case of alchemy is that there such knowledge is simply impossible, not created in the creatures because it is incompatible with the wisdom of the Creator, whereas

¹⁷⁶ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 261-262.

¹⁷⁷ In this respect, I would disagree with the view of Nassif Nassar, who argues that in his repudiation of astrology Ibn Khaldūn's "critique n'est pas conçue en termes de théologie ou de métaphysique" (*La pensée réaliste d'Ibn Khaldūn*: 85), although he is right in asserting that in Ibn Khaldūn's critique of astrology "c'est la problème de la connaissance en tant que telle..." (*ibid.*: 85). However, theological argument plays quite an important role in refuting astrology, and also other occult sciences.

¹⁷⁸ *Muqaddima*: 522.

¹⁷⁹ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 262.

¹⁸⁰ Ullmann, *op. cit.*, 274: "Zu verstehen ist die außerordentliche Wirkung der Astrologie nur, wenn man bedenkt, daß sie nicht allein der Versuch war, die Zukunft und das Schicksal des Menschen vorauszusagen. Sie war vielmehr Ausdruck des Strebens, die Welt ganzheitlich zu deuten; die menschliche Seele suchte durch sie den Frieden im Universum".

here such knowledge, apart from being impossible, is also undesirable; even if it were possible, it would be appropriate to prohibit it and the ways to achieving it.

In the end Ibn Khaldūn repudiates astrology for the harm that it bears for human society. He states that astrology arouses in men empty expectations concerning the future of the state, which result in longstanding enmity among people; therefore, it has to be forbidden for everyone, since it “results in great harm for the state and religion”.¹⁸¹ In a chapter devoted to eschatological divination (*jafr*), which observes the conjunctions of heavenly bodies in order to predict the future of state, Ibn Khaldūn enumerates in detail the harm that astrology, and *jafr* using astrological methods, can bring to human society.¹⁸² He says that the people foster these empty expectations because of their inability to effect somehow the affairs of the state.¹⁸³

This is the reason why astrology, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is prohibited by jurisprudence, which “is of general usefulness in both religious and worldly affairs...”.¹⁸⁴ Although this science has been widely taught and disseminated among people, and despite the fact that its sources, the Qur’an and the Prophetic Tradition, are easily available to people, only a few of each age have had the capacity to achieve the mastery of it. How can it then be possible, Ibn Khaldūn argues, to achieve the knowledge of a science such as astrology, which has been forbidden by the law and concealed from people.¹⁸⁵ Hence, all the things that people of this art claim are mere guesses and suppositions.¹⁸⁶

Oneiromancy

In his *Muqaddima* Ibn Khaldūn treats also the art of dream interpretation. Being a type of divination, within the whole range of the occult sciences generally refuted by the Arab author, this has earned quite a different evaluation, being even praised by him.

¹⁸¹ *Muqaddima*: 522.

¹⁸² Cf. Ullmann, *op. cit.*: 274: “... wurde die Astrologie eine gefährliche Konkurrentin der religion, und so konnte es nicht ausbleiben, dass immer wieder Theologen aufstanden, um einen entchiedenen und erbitterten Kampf gegen sie zu führen”. Ibn Khaldūn’s refutation of alchemy on the basis of the social harm that it bears is very much in line with al-Fārābī’s attitude towards the astrologers.

¹⁸³ *Muqaddima*: 328.

¹⁸⁴ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 263.

¹⁸⁵ *Muqaddima*: 522. On the social role of astrology in Medieval Muslim society, see Saliba, *op. cit.*: 45-67.

¹⁸⁶ *Muqaddima*: 522.

The understanding of such a position could reaffirm some of my statements on the perception of supernatural knowledge and the relationship of man towards occult powers by Ibn Khaldūn.

Ibn Khaldūn defines the nature of dreams in natural-scientific terms.¹⁸⁷ It is by the rational soul, *al-rūḥ al-‘aql* (which is identical with perception, *dhātuḥu ‘ayn al-idrāk*), that human beings perceive everything. But the rational soul is hindered from achieving supernatural knowledge because of the “veil of senses”, that is, the occupation of the soul with the body and bodily perceptions. In other words, the material bodily sensations cover or block the channels of transcendental awareness for the rational soul. During sleep, when the bodily perceptions of men are extinguished, the rational soul turns to its real essence,¹⁸⁸ thus becoming capable of supernatural knowledge: “Through its essence, the rational spirit¹⁸⁹ perceives everything that is in the divine world, since its reality and its essence are identical with perception. It is prevented from assimilating any supernatural perception by the veil of its preoccupation with the body and the corporeal powers and senses. If it were without that veil or stripped of it, it would return to its reality, which is identical with perception... It is thus able to catch a glimpse of its own world, since external sense perception, its greatest preoccupation, now occupies it less”.¹⁹⁰

The greater the capacity of soul is to abstract itself from these bodily perceptions, the more the veil of senses will be removed, and the more perfect its spiritual perceptions will be. The means to attain pure knowledge perceived by the rational soul is the imagination, which translates it into pictures that resemble the realities acquired by man through the senses.

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldūn classifies dreams according to their sources.¹⁹¹ This classification is made on theological grounds; how-

¹⁸⁷ See a brief summary of oneiromancy and the sources on it in Toufic Fahd, “Les songes et leurs interprétation selon l’Islam”, *Sources Orientales* 2 (Paris, 1959): 125-158.

¹⁸⁸ I.e., it becomes capable of perceiving the objects with its pure spiritual essence, without bodily means.

¹⁸⁹ I have, unlike Rosenthal, used in the main text the term “rational soul” instead of “rational spirit”.

¹⁹⁰ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 104.

¹⁹¹ Taking into consideration the fact that Arabic oneiromancy was influenced by Graeco-Roman dream interpretation (see Fahd, *op.cit.*: 149), I would like to point out the similitude of the tripartite division of dreams according to Ibn Khaldūn’s doctrine and the Late Antique theory, although, there is a difference in the sources of dreams. Unlike Ibn Khaldūn’s classification, Tertullian, the first Christian theoretician of dreams, classifies them as being sent by God, by demons, and finally, generated by the soul itself (see Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, Princeton, 1994: 68-69). On the concept of magic in

ever, there is also a natural-scientific connotation: dreams are sent to men either by God, by angels, or by the devil, but the degree to which the soul will be able to achieve supernatural knowledge depends on its natural capacities to abstract itself from sensory perceptions.

Dream visions sent by God “are evident and need no explanation”.¹⁹² These dreams are akin to prophetic revelation, their source being God. And very often, divine revelation itself is sent to prophets in the form of dreams.¹⁹³ However, Ibn Khaldūn does not state that these kinds of dreams can be seen exclusively by prophets. If the soul of any person is capable of ridding itself completely of sense perceptions, it will also be able to attain this type of dream visions.

The next type is the dreams sent by angels (*ru'yā ṣāliha*). These “are true dreams that require interpretation”.¹⁹⁴ And finally, the dreams that are inspired by the Devil are confused dreams. The difference between this type of dreams and the previous ones is that true dream visions come from the rational spirit, which perceives by its essence, whereas confused dreams originate from the images which were stored in the memory with the help of the imagination.

Interpretation of dreams is needed because the pictures perceived by the rational soul take the shape of objects which are familiar to the person, objects which have been perceived by the senses. “The rational spirit has its perceptions and passes them on to the imagination. [The imagination] then forms them into pictures but it forms them only into such pictures as are somehow related to the [perceived] idea. ...It should be known that when the spirit passes its perceptions on to the imagination, [the latter] depicts them in the customary moulds of sensual perception. Where such moulds never existed in sensual perception, [the imagination] cannot form any pictures. A [person who was] born blind could not depict a ruler by an ocean, an enemy by a serpent, or a woman by vessels, because he had never perceived any such things. For him, the imagination would depict those things

Graeco-Roman world in general, see in detail M.W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, London-New York, 2001: 18-47.

¹⁹² Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 108.

¹⁹³ “‘Ā’isha said: the first time the Prophet, may God pray upon him, received revelation, it was in the form of dream: he did not see dreams, until they came like the dawn” (*Shifā’ al-sā’it* 83).

¹⁹⁴ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 108.

through similarly appropriate [pictures] derived from the type of perceptions with which he is familiar—that is, things which can be heard or smelled”.¹⁹⁵

The science of dream interpretation uses the method of analogy in order to derive the true meaning of dreams. For instance, if one has seen the ocean, this can be interpreted as the designation of a ruler, or, likewise, a serpent could mean enmity, and so on. However, Ibn Khaldūn admits that the interpretation of certain images can be different in different contexts. Therefore, the interpreter must know all the “general rules” according to which he will be able to interpret the dreams correctly.¹⁹⁶

Ibn Khaldūn, having had, as we saw, none too favourable an attitude towards any kinds of divination, suddenly admits the licit character of the art of dream interpretation, stating that “Dream interpretation is a science resplendent with the light of prophecy, because prophecy and dreams are related to each other, and [dreams] played a part in the [prophetic] revelation...”.¹⁹⁷ Thus, the oneiromancy is praised by Ibn Khaldūn because of the importance that, as he thinks, it has for prophetic revelation.

But what about the dreams which are not prophetic revelations, but are true dreams experienced by a saint. Such a dream differs from a prophetic revelation, since it has no soteriological function, in the same way that the supernatural knowledge of saints acquired through exercise differs from prophetic revelation. And saintly knowledge acquired by supernatural means is, for Ibn Khaldūn, not an end in itself, and is to be kept secret,¹⁹⁸ whereas non-prophetic (but angelically inspired) dreams, as stated above, must be interpreted.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*: 107-109.

¹⁹⁶ *Muqaddima*: 477-478. Cf., in this regard, the views on the same subject of Artemidorus, a second-century A.D. thinker, the author of *Oneirocritica*: “The personal and cultural context of the dreamer must be thoroughly investigated, and attention must be given to the arrangement and interrelationships of all of a dreamer’s images. Just as the particularities of the dreamer—identity, occupation, birth, financial status, health, age, and mood—require specification, so also the particulars of the dream need careful perusal so that each sign can be fitted properly to the whole” (Patricia Cox Miller, *op. cit.*: 83-84). It is interesting to note that *Oneirocritica* of this author was translated into Arabic, and the possibility of direct or indirect influence on Ibn Khaldūn is not excluded. Although Ibn Khaldūn does not specify what the precise techniques of the dream interpreter are, we can suppose that they are very similar to those described by this Late Antique author. See also Fahd, *op. cit.*: 145: “Tous les auteurs insistent sur la nécessité, pour l’interprète, d’avoir des connaissances vastes et profonds dans toutes les branches de la science”.

¹⁹⁷ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 110.

¹⁹⁸ Ibn Khaldūn mentions that the famous Sufi mystic al-Hallāj was killed because of “divulging the secret” (*Shifā’ al-sā’it*: 56).

In order to understand the reason of such an approach properly, one must look at the interpretation of dreams in the wider context of supernatural knowledge, comparing it to the idea of “activeness” and “passiveness” as represented in the above section on magic. There I have argued that for Ibn Khaldūn the criterion for being licit or illicit is the role assumed by the magician with regard to the supernatural source of his power. The more passive he is, the closer his action to the definition of “licit”. Likewise, in acquiring supernatural knowledge, the one who assumes an active wish and effort for acquiring knowledge is condemned, whereas the one who simply receives this knowledge is not blamed by Ibn Khaldūn. Accordingly, the dreamer plays an utterly passive role in acquiring this knowledge: he attains it naturally and not by effort: “... [the supernatural knowledge by means of dreams] occurs to human beings unintentionally and without their having power over it. The soul occupies itself with a thing. As a result, it obtains that glimpse [of the supernatural] while it is asleep, and it sees that thing. It does not plan it that way”.¹⁹⁹

This is probably the reason, why Ibn Khaldūn considers the art of dream interpretation as licit. The dreamer does not make any effort to attain this knowledge, rather, it occurs to him *per se*.

However, the author describes certain techniques with the help of which one can see in his dream things, the knowledge of which is impossible with sensory perceptions.²⁰⁰ One has to pronounce certain magical words (*ḥalūma*), after which one can see in his dream the desired thing. Ibn Khaldūn says that even he has had such visions due to the use of these words. Nonetheless, he states that the use of these magical words does not necessarily result in seeing the desired object. It simply creates preparedness for the soul to attain the knowledge about it; it does not mean that the knowledge will occur.²⁰¹ Consequently, the knowledge attained by this type of exercises is also accidental and is not necessary. Ibn Khaldūn does not evaluate this type of visions from the point of

¹⁹⁹ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 1: 212.

²⁰⁰ These techniques, according to Toufic Fahd, have been taken from Antiquity: “De l’incubation antique, a survécu l’*istikhāra*. Ce rite, devenu canonique... consiste essentiellement à s’endormir, après avoir récité une prière spéciale... dans l’attente d’une révélation en songe, concernant une décision à prendre” (Fahd, *op.cit.*: 149; see also Doutté, *op. cit.*: 410). For the practice of incubation in Antiquity, see Benjamin Kilborne, “Dreams”, *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade: “The very close relations between dreams, misfortune, suffering, and illness are represented by the Mediterranean practice of incubation, the sleeping in a sacred place in order to dream a cure to ailments of body and soul, and to seek guidance, fortune, and knowledge of the future from a divine being”.

²⁰¹ *Muqaddima*: 105.

view of the knowledge attained through them, but he still implies the inferiority of the knowledge attained by spells, i.e. by personal efforts of the dreamer, to that acquired by ordinary dreams. Due to this fact, we may once more assert the idea that he is unfavourable to the supernatural knowledge achieved intentionally, at least to its use for practical ends (such as predicting the future, etc.).²⁰²

The Refutation of Philosophy

Philosophy, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is a science claiming that all the existence, both the sensible part and what is beyond it, is sensible, and can be apprehended by rational speculation.²⁰³ People who occupy themselves with this science are called philosophers (*falāsifa*, plural of *ḥaylasūf*). “There are [certain] intelligent representatives of the human species who think that the essences and conditions of the whole existence, both the part of it perceivable by the senses and that beyond sensual perception, as well as the reasons and causes of [those essences and conditions], can be perceived by mental speculation and intellectual reasoning”.²⁰⁴

As an instrument for this science these people use logic (*manṭiq*), which is a “norm enabling intellectual speculation to distinguish between true and false”.²⁰⁵ The process of cognition which the philosophers, as depicted by Ibn Khaldūn, acknowledge is the following. First the human intellect perceives the basic ideas that are separate from the beings they represent, and which are imprinted on everyone’s mind. These are called “primary intelligibles”.²⁰⁶ Then the intellect step by step abstracts itself from these concrete intelligibles, until there remain only the most general and pure notions, the supreme genera (*al-ajnās al-‘āliya*), called the secondary intelligibles.²⁰⁷ This is apparently the process of making an abstraction from concrete images, perceived by the human mind by means of the senses, to general ideas, which are devoid of con-

²⁰² Even the knowledge of saints, as was already mentioned, is not to be divulged.

²⁰³ On Ibn Khaldūn’s views on the philosophers, see Rosenthal, E. “Ibn Jaldūn’s Attitude to the *Falāsifa*”, *Al-Andalus* 20 (1955): 75-85. Cf. also Nassar, *op. cit.*: 61-69.

²⁰⁴ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 246-247.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*: 247.

²⁰⁶ These are regarded by Avicenna as primary elements of reasoning which are apprehended intuitively, and from the knowledge of which the knowledge of the “secondary intelligibles” is derived (Fakhry, *op. cit.*: 162).

²⁰⁷ *Muqaddima*: 514. This bipartite schema bears a considerable influence of Aristotle’s views.

crete features.²⁰⁸ And finally, in order to apprehend reality “as it is”, the mind has to combine some of these ideas, keeping them separate with “unequivocal rational argumentation”, which “should give [the mind] a correct and conformable... [correspondence] of existence...”²⁰⁹ The tool of this process of combination and judgement is called assent (*taṣḍīq*). But the final end of cognition is the perception, the assent being a tool for reaching it.²¹⁰ In whole, the system represented by Ibn Khaldūn is that of Avicenna, for whom the rational reasoning is built on the direct perception of some primary principles, on which then all demonstration is based.²¹¹

Further, Ibn Khaldūn says, the philosophers claim that the cognition of the things, both those which are within the scope of bodily perceptions, and those which are not, brings us real happiness: “[The] philosophers think that happiness consists in arriving at perception of all existing things, both the *sensibilia* and the [things] beyond sensual perception, with the help of [rational] speculation and argumentation”.²¹²

The philosophers also claim that happiness consists of intellection combined with the purification of the soul and its cultivation by virtue, even if no revealed law has been received for discerning between vice and virtue.²¹³

²⁰⁸ “... l’intelligence... travaille sur ces représentations pour en tirer d’autres, plus générales et moins entachées de sensible” (Nassar, *op. cit.*: 63).

²⁰⁹ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 248.

²¹⁰ These views, Ibn Khaldūn says, can be found in the books of the logicians. Among the most illustrious Muslim philosophers are, according to the author, Avicenna and al-Fārābī. “Al-Fārābī’s theory of demonstration itself centres on an analysis of the conditions that must be satisfied for the acquisition of science or knowledge (*‘ilm* = Greek *epistēmē*). Like the other Islamic Aristotelians who were to follow him, al-Fārābī bases this analysis upon a distinction between two fundamental cognitive acts, conceptualisation (*taṣawwūr*) and assent (*taṣḍīq*). The former act is that whereby we apprehend simple concepts, and when it is complete or perfect, it enables us to extract the essence of the object conceived. The latter act of assent issues in a judgement of truth or falsehood, and when it is perfect or complete, it yields certain knowledge”. (Deborah L. Black, “Al-Fārābī”, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, vol. 1, London and New York, 1996: 183). The Aristotelian background of Ibn Khaldūn’s views on philosophy can be seen in the fact that he relies very often on Avicenna and al-Fārābī, characterised by Henry Corbin as “les philosophes hellénisants”. They “disposaient en arabe d’un ensemble d’œuvres d’Aristote et des ses commentateurs, de textes de Platon et de Galen” (Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique. Des origines jusqu’à la mort d’Averroès* (1198), Paris, 1964: 216).

²¹¹ Fakhry, *op. cit.*: 153-154.

²¹² Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 248.

²¹³ This Neo-Platonic idea was known in the Islamic philosophy, especially to al-Fārābī (Fakhry, *op. cit.*: 142).

After defining the views of the philosophers, or at least what he deems worthy of defining and relevant for his treatise, i.e., that directly or indirectly deals with human society and related matters, Ibn Khaldūn levels a many-sided attack against their doctrines.

First, philosophy is false because it contradicts the nature of human knowledge, and claims that all being can either be perceived by means of the senses or deduced by logical operations.²¹⁴ He shows the mode of human perception, and tries to prove in a scientific way why the philosophers' claims about it are false. Human beings, Ibn Khaldūn says, consist of two parts, physical and spiritual. And it is the spiritual part that actually receives the knowledge. Sensible realities are perceived by this part through bodily means, whereas the knowledge of the spiritual ones is attained by the soul by means of its own essence (*bi dhātihī*), without any intermediary. "All the judgements of the mind are general ones, whereas the *existentia* of the outside world are individual in their substances. Perhaps, there is something in those substances that prevents conformity between the universal [judgements] of the mind and the individual [substances] of the outside world".²¹⁵

Ibn Khaldūn thus brings a nominalist argument stating that the knowledge of sensible realities is restricted for men because the material objects, from the perception of which we proceed to the knowledge of the secondary intelligibles, are concrete entities outside us, and our perception of them constitutes only some general notions. Then he proceeds with an epistemological argument stating that possibly there is something in the material bodies that hinders their complete and perfect imprinting in our mind. Hence, all our further deductions will be false, hence, the complete knowledge of the secondary intelligibles is also impossible.²¹⁶

Moreover, whereas the knowledge of sensible world is to some extent possible by the senses and by the intellect, the knowledge of spiritual substances in this way is impossible altogether. To do that, men have to get rid of the "veil of the senses", as do those

²¹⁴ Ibn Khaldūn holds that nature is "... an intrinsic character which defines a given object, along with 'the potency immanent in a thing', causing it to unfold in the way it does" (Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought*: 10). In fact, Ibn Khaldūn's refutations of occult sciences "are all based upon a basic idea, that these crafts run against the nature of things: against the nature of human intellect, against the nature of properties of matter, and against the truth, and therefore nature, of dogma" (Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn*: 115).

²¹⁵ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 251.

²¹⁶ "Pour Ibn Khaldūn, la prétention des philosophes à connaître les substances et l'être est "fausse dans tous ses aspects". Sa démonstration repose sur l'impossibilité d'une certitude rationnelle dans l'adéquation des résultats de l'abstraction aux choses" (Nassar, *op. cit.*: 64).

who are capable of supernatural perception, such as prophets, saints and diviners. "The Sufis... attempt to kill the bodily powers and perceptions through exercise, and even the thinking power of the brain. In this way, the soul is to achieve the perception that comes to it from its own essence, when all the disturbances and the hindrances caused by the body are removed".²¹⁷

Furthermore, the repudiation of philosophy is put on theological grounds. It is contrary to religion to seek the knowledge of natural truths.²¹⁸ In fact, very often being contrary to the nature of knowledge is regarded by Ibn Khaldūn as being contrary to the nature of religion (that is, being wrong from the religious point of view). This does not, however, mean that one is determined by the other; they are opposed in their implications and their teleological value. The fact that philosophy goes contrary to the nature of knowledge means that it is simply useless, since its goals are unachievable. In the theological arguments of the author one can see the implication that even if it were possible for this science to reach its end, it would be inappropriate to do it since it is bad from the religious point of view.²¹⁹ This ambivalence between the two types of arguments can be seen more clearly in his refutations of astrology and alchemy. First he rejects on natural-scientific grounds the very fundamentals of these sciences, but then he says that although it might be theoretically possible for them to achieve their ends, it is bad to occupy oneself with astrology or alchemy, since it contradicts the principles of religion. Here, with regard to philosophy, Ibn Khaldūn does not actually pronounce this kind of knowledge to be theoretically possible, simply stating that "primary *intelligibilia* are more likely to agree with the outside world".²²⁰ However,

²¹⁷ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 254.

²¹⁸ In Ibn Khaldūn's repudiation of complete knowledge we can see parallels with al-Ghazālī's repudiation of causal necessity, when he refutes the philosophers' view that all the events in the world happen due to causal necessity, saying that they happen in reality due to God's will (see Fakhry, *op. cit.*, 258-260). This view, as later was noted by Averroes, would lead to the repudiation of reason at all. He states then that if al-Ghazālī were right "no rational pattern could be discerned in the Creation" (*ibid.*: 319).

²¹⁹ According to Rosenthal, Khaldūn's attitude towards various social institutions, movements and phenomena is determined by two factors. First, his being an orthodox Muslim, and, second, by his empiricism (see Rosenthal, "Jaldūn's attitude to the Falāsifa": 75). This is a true statement in general, particularly as it concerns the religious priorities of Ibn Khaldūn. As to his empiricism, although it may be held true again with regard to the occult sciences (mainly astrology and alchemy), nevertheless, Ibn Khaldūn's views on philosophy, do not seem to be very empirical. He simply tries to speak in natural-scientific terms, but no empiricism can be found there.

²²⁰ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 251.

a similar implication can be deduced if we look at the refutations of astrology and alchemy.

Philosophy is condemnable, since it claims that the complete knowledge of the world (the corporeal one, as well as the supernatural one), which is attained by the means of logical operations, brings supreme happiness to human beings. What really causes great joy and happiness to the soul is the supernatural knowledge attained without any intermediary. "Thus, there can be no doubt that the soul finds even greater joy and pleasure in the perceptions that come from its own essence without an intermediary. When the spiritual soul becomes conscious of the perception coming to it from its own essence without an intermediary, it derives from it inexpressible joy and pleasure".²²¹

The theological implications of this statement become more obvious when we look at Ibn Khaldūn's ideas about achieving supreme happiness, as shown in his treatise on Sufism, *Shifā' al-sā'il li tahdhīb al masā'il*. Here he examines the concept of happiness in clearly theological terms, as something "which [occurs from] contemplating the face of God".

Finally, Ibn Khaldūn introduces the idea that philosophy may cause harm to human society. "It cannot and does not reach its objective: the perception of all Existing things, besides it, teaches doctrines contrary to the divinely revealed laws and their plain sense".²²² First of all it is so because it preaches all-embracing knowledge, which is certainly harmful from the religious point of view and consequently, for society, because religion for Ibn Khaldūn is something indispensable for human civilisation and the state.²²³

Then, and Ibn Khaldūn seems to be more concerned about this, the philosophers teach that it is possible to achieve happiness comprehending the existence with the help of the intellect, and with cultivating one's soul with good qualities and achieving virtue. But this, as the philosophers claim, is possible by mere intellectual contemplation and man's natural striving towards good, and therefore there is no need for any religious law in order to achieve this end. "[The philosophers] ...assume that happiness consists in the perception of existence with the help of... [intellec-

²²¹ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 253.

²²² Rosenthal, *op. cit.*: 76.

²²³ "He is convinced that Islam as a system of life and thought is the perfect example of the Highest Good and ideally supplies a complete answer to his empirical inquiry into the laws and practice of human association" (Rosenthal, *op. cit.*: 75).

tual] conclusions... combined with the improvement of the soul's acceptance of a virtuous character. Even if no religious law had been revealed [to help man to distinguish between virtue and vice], they think the [acquisition of virtue] possible by man because he is able to distinguish between vice and virtue in [his] actions by means of intellect..."²²⁴

We can clearly see how the line of argumentation of Ibn Khaldūn is in keeping with his ideas about the knowledge of prophets, saints and diviners. Although here he mainly talks about the knowledge of the sensory world, the denial of complete knowledge of reality resembles his attitude towards the knowledge of the occult, especially in what refers to social life. In fact, both his refutations of the two kinds of knowledge have in common the basic idea, that they can harm human society, and that all-embracing knowledge, whether it be achieved by supernatural or by intellectual means, contradicts religion, and is therefore inimical to social welfare. And just as in the case with divination, as well as alchemy and astrology, Ibn Khaldūn states that even if complete knowledge (in this case intellectual) were possible, it should be avoided and banned, for being contrary to both religion and society.

²²⁴ Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3: 249.